THE FOUNDATIONAL STANDPOINT OF MĀDHYAMIKA PHILOSOPHY

BY

GADJIN NAGAO

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TRANSLATED BY JOHN P. KEENAN

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Foreword

For centuries Western philosophers, in their dominant metaphysical mode, have begun their philosophizing in Aristotelian wonder. Yet in the very development of their metaphysical attempts to penetrate to the source of that wonder, the task of fabricating their questions often replaces that originating wonder and functions in a presumed total self-reference. Well-honed philosophic systems enclose their participants within the interlocking meanings of their basic definitions. Wonder becomes displaced with work and questioning with clarifying. Wonder abates as metaphysics grows. In Heideggerian terms, one must overcome metaphysics to uncover the primal wonder before the ensemble of beings.[1]

Mādhyamika philosophy is an attempt to think in terms of the otherness of ultimate meaning, to develop philosophical discourse in constant awareness of the primary wonder of ultimate meaning, and in recognition of the failure of language to encapsulate that meaning. Mādhyamika is the central focus of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, lying barely concealed behind iconoclastic Zen aphorisms and permeating doctrinal thinking in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan.

The Mādhyamika thought of Nāgārjuna took its impetus from the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures and, like them, was aimed at a deconstruction of the earlier Abhidharma metaphysics. Abhidharma was an analytic and scholastically sophisticated conceptualism produced by the monk-scholars of India. They attempted to map the nature of reality by identifying and defining the essences (*svabhāva*) of things and then outlining the specific stages on the path to awakening in the light of those essences. The Prajñāpāramitā response was to make fun of these Abhidharma pretentions, and the nameless authors of these Prajñāpāramitā scriptures delighted in dropping conundrums at the feet of the scholastics, who, like their latter-day counterparts, were ill-equipped to deal with jokes. "A bodhisattva is a bodhisattva," the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures announce, "because there is no bodhisattva! And that is why there is a

bodhisattva." In the perfection of wisdom (prajñā-pāramitā), a bodhisattva has no essence. All things are empty of essence. And that emptiness is declared to be their very being.

But, humorous though their rhetoric may have been, the Prajñāpāramitā texts had a serious purpose. The conceptualism and essentialism of the scholastic path was felt to be not only overbearing and irrelevant, but also an obstacle to awakening. The desire for the security of following the "right" path laid out in clear and precise concepts preempts effort toward awakening and precludes awareness of the complete otherness of the goal, an otherness anticipated by no previous expectations. Nāgārjuna took up this Prajñāpāramitā theme, but presented it through a reasoned and logical argumentation against all forms of conceptualism. His reasoning wrought a revolution in Buddhist thinking and established the basic structure of one of the world's major philosophic traditions.

Mādhyamika philosophy has not provoked serious philosophical reflection in the West. Parallels drawn with Western thought are more often seen by Western thinkers as confirming positions they already hold than as challenging them to rethink those positions. The affirmation that all things are empty of essence finds a ready acceptance among some Heideggerian thinkers, with their agenda of overcoming metaphysics. The emphasis on dependent co-arising is quickly welcomed by some Whiteheadians, who see the entire universe as an interdependent, organistic whole. Heideggerians and Whiteheadians welcome Nāgārjuna as confirmations of their own thinking, while critics of these philosophers see Nāgārjuna as no less misguided in approach and content.

Read in its own Indian context, Mādhyamika is not easily accessible to Westerners. It presents a rather forbidding discourse embedded in an alien imagery, developing as it did out of a felt need to refute Indian Abhidharma thinkers long since dead and mostly forgotten. The Western philosopher cannot adopt Nāgārjuna's rhetoric, however logical and reasoned it might be, for they do not face his problematic. His refutation of essences (*svabhāva*) finds ready agreement among most Western thinkers, whether scientific or philosophic, and there seems to be no need to enlist Nāgārjuna to overcome Western metaphysics.[2] Yet, despite its classical Indian context, Mādhyamika philosophy offers an interlocking set of deep insights into the genesis of illusion and the dialectics that might overcome that illusion. As with any classical system, in order to reclaim Mādhyamika, one must not only delve into Nāgārjuna's historical context, but also relate his thought to our modern discourse and focus it on present questions. Indeed, the inability to do so marks a system as of no more than historical interest. Such a reclaiming is what this book attempts to do. It is not a study of the way Indians

thought long ago, but a reclaiming of Mādhyamika for modern philosophic discourse.[3]

The uniqueness of Mādhyamika lies not simply in its basic notions of emptiness and dependent co-arising. Nagao argues that the two interlocking themes of Mādhyamika are the identity of emptiness with dependent co-arising and the absolute disjunction between ultimate meaning and worldly convention. Mādhyamika attempts to hold in dynamic tension a double awareness. In the first place, it stresses the emptiness of ultimate meaning as completely other from dependently co-arisen and worldly discourse, which always fails to capture any ultimate meaning. In the second place, it attempts to validate true worldly reasoning both in deconstructing all essentialist notions and in constructing skillful languages that enflesh meanings in full harmony with ultimate meaning.

Mādhyamika understands itself to be a skillful discourse, ready at any moment to turn its questioning back upon the worldly and conventional ground of its own discourse and deconstruct its own terms in favor of the immediacy of the experience of awakening. It is, in Nagao's terms, a standpoint of no standpoint, since it offers no final position that might identify it among the theories of the philosophical savants. Its salient characteristic is found in wrestling an opening in speech for the phantom trace of emptiness, in resurrecting worldly conventional discourse in full recognition of the final deconfirmation of all words and discourse.

Mādhyamika discourse remains alien to Western ears and eyes. A Western philosopher usually spends years mastering the words and ideas peculiar to his or her own adopted area of study. Recommendations to turn attention from one's own personal philosophic tradition to engage in the alien discourse of Mādhyamika philosophy fall on ears already attuned to their own words and minds accustomed to handling their own ideas. After all, a person is capable of only so much before passing however gladly into that sweet night of final repose. Yet to those who have the zest and energy to engage themselves in an new kind of discourse and to learn how to talk this alien philosophy, Mādhyamika offers a world of fresh and challenging insights.

Philosophical traditions grow by encountering alien notions and languages that cannot be easily fit into preexisting language patterns. English "is saturated with Protestant Christian, or, in some cases post-Christain, values and connotations. It is, one imagines, a difficult language in which to practice Buddhism. Nevertheless, it is not *impossible* to be a Buddhist, a Taoist, or even a member of the Aetherius Society in excellent English. Indeed, we recall that it is the introduction of

alien concepts, for which no adequate equivalent exists, that has the greatest effect upon the development of a language."[4] Nagao's presentation of the foundational standpoint of Mādhyamika philosophy can effect such a freshening of philosophic language patterns by introducing a rich and profound alternate tradition of philosophizing.

Nagao himself is an eminent Buddhologist of international reputation. He was born in Sendai to a priestly family in the Shinshū Pure Land tradition of Shinran. His father was in charge of a temple belonging to the Nishihongan-ji branch of the Shinshū sect. He began his schooling in Sapporo where his father was in charge of a temple. After moving during grammar school to Kyoto, he finished his secondary schooling and entered the then Kyoto Imperial University, graduating in 1931. He has spent a lifetime in teaching and research and held the high position of the Chair of Buddhist Studies at Kyoto University. During the war years, he traveled throughout Mongolia visiting Lamaist monasteries and doing field research for the Toko Bunka Research Center. At present, he pursues an active "retirement" in Kyoto, directing projects and participating in research endeavors.[5]

Nagao Gadjin's interpretation of Mādhyamika thinking is itself structured by his background. Under the guidance of his mentor, Yamaguchi Susumu, he studied not only Mādhyamika thought but also Yogācāra philosophy. He sees these two Indian schools as constituting a single organic process in Mahāyāna thought. The Mādhyamika of Nāgārjuna presents the basic principle of Mahāyāna Buddhism in its themes of emptiness, dependent co-arising, and the two truths, while Yogācāra works out the ramifications in terms of a critical understanding of consciousness. Thus, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra are not seen as competing schools, although in later Indian Buddhism they did come to assume adversarial positions. The hallmark of Nagao's scholarship is this assertion of the organic relationship between these two fundamental streams of Mahāyāna thinking.[6]

In the translation that follows, Nagao contrasts his understanding of Mādhyamika with the San-lun School of Chi-tsang. This is not done merely to highlight Nagao's reading of Nāgārjuna. The San-lun school constituted the East Asian tradition of interpreting Mādhyamika thought. The interpretation Nagao presents differs significantly from this San-lun tradition and relies heavily on the thought of Tsong-kha-pa, the great Tibetan commentator and thinker. It is through Tsong-kha-pa and the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of Candrakīrti that Nagao understands Mādhyamika.[7]

Nagao also makes use of Pure Land themes. The omnipresent theme of ascent/descent and other-power/self-power come from his

Pure Land tradition. They are employed to describe the Mahāyāna dynamic of transcendent awareness of emptiness and its subsequent reengagement in the world.[8]

I would like to thank Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan. It was when employed there that this translation was begun and its first drafts completed. Special thanks go to its director, Jan VanBragt, who painstakingly corrected the translation page by page. Without his contribution the task could not have been brought to completion. My appreciation also goes to Paul Swanson and James Heisig who have proofread the manuscript and often made it into a more recognizable English.

John P. Keenan

Preface

Taking as his source the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures, the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna (150-250 C.E.) established Mādhyamika philosophy as the foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This school not only provided the fundamental standpoint for all Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine, but also set the basic pattern for all subsequent doctrinal development. Any Mahāyāna doctrine must be grounded on Mādhyamika philosophy. It is for this reason that Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mādhyamika school, is revered as a patriarch of eight different schools of Buddhist thought. His significance as a patriarch of these particular schools lies not only in his grounding various sectarian teachings, but also in the foundational position his thought provides for the whole of Buddhist doctrine. It is not just that Nāgārjuna's thought has been incorporated into the teachings of these schools; the standpoint of Mādhyamika philosophy itself came to be the basic Mahāyāna understanding, in the light of which Buddha's doctrine confronts the world and other systems of thought. What then is Mādhyamika philosophy?

To anticipate my conclusion, the thesis of this discussion consists in two parallel themes. The first theme is that Mādhyamika is the identification of dependent co-arising with emptiness. Its salient feature is not merely a discourse on emptiness; nor is it simply an explanation of dependent co-arising. The unique achievement of Mādhyamika lies in its unification and synthesis of both these elements.

Second, I contend that the Mādhyamika understanding of the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention reflects the identification of the above theme and therefore must be included as central to our consideration of Mādhyamika philosophy. Dependent co-arising, emptiness, and their identification are themes that encompass all meanings whatsoever. The same can be said of ultimate meaning and worldly convention, whose interrelationship also includes all meaning. These two basic themes of the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising and the two truths relate to the same world as it is experienced in

different dimensions. They intersect at right angles, so that the absolute otherness that separates ultimate meaning from worldly convention is complementary to the identification of co-arising and emptiness. The theme of the two truths is as close as Mādhyamika will come to evolving a world view, while the identification of emptiness and dependent co-arising reflects the Mādhyamika awareness of more ethical and critical concerns.

The identification of dependent co-arising and emptiness has often been taught to be a matter of direct insight, a feature characteristic of the religions of the East. The two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention have been a central topic of discussion throughout Buddhist doctrinal history. But the logical elucidation of the relationship between the theme of the identification of dependent co-arising with emptiness and the theme of the two truths has, it seems, seldom been treated.

NAGAO Gadjin

Chapter 1

Mādhyamika Philosophy

Emptiness: The Mādhyamika Notion of Emptiness Contrasted with the Lesser Vehicle and the Abhidharma Schools

Mādhyamika philosophy is primarily a philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā-vāda*), teaching that all things are without essence and empty, that the nature of reality is emptiness. Similar ideas about emptiness or nothingness are common in Eastern thought. Within Buddhism, this way of thinking first appeared consistently with the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures and the Mahāyāna philosophy of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika. Its central theme, emptiness, was revolutionary for Buddhism. Its doctrine of the absence of essence and the emptiness of all beings, signifies non-being. In other words, the being of all beings in emptiness is itself empty. All beings are constituted in virtue of their essence, or selfhood, but that selfhood is now proclaimed to be non-existent. I am not an existent being. The existent I is completely and permanently dissolved and brought to non-being, and therefore I am empty. Mādhyamika is the nullification of the standpoint of self: in that sense, it is rather like a standpoint that is not a standpoint at all.

By making one constantly look into the abyss of nothingness and confront the death of the self, emptiness became an object of human dread. For the Word-Hearers and Solitary Enlightened Ones, emptiness was a dreaded reversal of their standpoint, an overturning of the ground of selfhood. This is why emptiness came to be the salient feature of Mahāyāna and was seen as revolutionary doctrine by the schools of the "Lesser" Vehicle, which from beginning to end adhered to the standpoint of being. The difference between Mahāyāna (the Great Vehicle) and Hīnayāna (the Lesser Vehicle) does not rest on a single, horizontal plane. "Great" and "lesser" do not indicate a difference in degree or in quantity but a radical shift to non-being as a standpoint. Mahāyāna is insight into the emptiness of being. Its understanding of the emptiness

of all beings represents a penetration into the illusory descriptions of all beings. It is a profound awareness that thoroughly discerns the true patterns of all beings. It is an emptiness of a broad, great vehicle in which nothing at all is carried. Within the Buddhist tradition, those who penetrate to the emptiness of this great vehicle regard the Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna and his followers as the pioneering endeavor.

Emptiness is not, however, simply nothingness. It is also immediately and necessarily the being of dependent co-arising. The statement that things are empty and non-existent is intended to clarify the reality of things, the true characteristics of our "self-existence."[1] Thus, emptiness is intended to be an expression of true being.

Formerly, the characteristic feature of emptiness was located in negation (*pratiṣedha*). It was held that Mādhyamika typically involved a dialectic of emptying wherein the being of things was negated and rendered non-existent. The Mādyamikans, it was thought, equated the refutation of false views with the manifestation of truth. But, Mādhyamika is not merely a logical procedure of refutation. Nor did they regard refutation in and of itself as a direct manifestation of truth, for in Mādhyamika the manifestation of truth needs to embody a more positive thrust. From both an ethical and a logical perspective, emptiness does not refer to a negative kind of truth, a theme we will return to later.

Traditionally Buddhist scholars have characterized emptiness as negation. At the same time, they have defined Mādhyamika as a theory of true reality, clearly distinguishable from the theories of dependent co-arising. They have aligned Mādhyamika theories of reality with the Abhidharma theories on the absolute reality of the factors of existence (*dharma*) and designated Mādhyamika as a "theory of true reality," in order to contrast and distinguish it from the theories of dependent co-arising with their ideas about such things as the accumulation of action (*karman*). In fact, however, in its true sense, true reality is dependent co-arising inasmuch as apart from dependent co-arising there is no reality of beings to be found. While Mādhyamika insight into emptiness penetrates to the non-being of all beings, it also leads one into the being of dependent co-arising in that dependent co-arising is an ordered sequence of things that somehow do indeed exist.

Dependent Co-Arising: The Mādhyamika Reclamation of this Central Notion; the Two Dimensions of Dependent Co-Arising

Dependent co-arising is central to primitive Buddhism and represents

indeed its fundamental standpoint. Accordingly, dependent co-arising must also fulfill a basic role for Mādhyamika philosophers who consistently intended to return to the original teachings of Śākyamuni. When Nāgārjuna composed his *Stanzas on the Middle*, he wrote in the invocational stanza: "I pay homage to the Sage who taught the profound doctrine of dependent co-arising." Indeed he regarded Śākyamuni as the great master precisely because of his elucidation of dependent co-arising. *The Scripture on the Ten Stages*, which treats the ten Bodhisattva stages, thematizes dependent co-arising in its sixth stage of "presence." The importance of the idea is indicated by its inclusion in a discussion of an awareness of the perfection of wisdom. It is called "the stage of presence" because it is there that awakening first becomes manifest. The commentator Candrakīrti (ca. 560-640) followed the structure of *The Scripture on the Ten Stages* in his systematic *Introductory to the Middle* and the larger portion of his commentary on the sixth stage is devoted to an examination of dependent co-arising. This is only one more indication of how central the understanding of dependent co-arising is to Mādhyamika philosophy.

Mādhyamika retained the primitive notion of dependent co-arising, or, more accurately, resurrected the dependent co-arising of reality (*dharmatā*) from the dependent co-arising of the reality factors (*dharma*) as presented in the Hīnayāna Dharma treatises, which had become hardened in rigidly formulated theory. In contrast to the Hīnayāna concept of dependent co-arising as the factors at work in reality—cause, condition, result, and so forth—Nāgārjuna reclaimed the doctrine of dependent co-arising as a doctrine of emptiness. In the Hīnayāna theories, the reality-factors were not empty. Nāgārjuna demured by understanding dependent co-arising in this manner. Indeed, he went so far as to claim that dependent co-arising entails the emptiness of beings and their absence of essence, and that it cannot be explained from an essentialist perspective. In Mādhyamika philosophy dependent co-arising itself is referred to as "dependent on this" (*idaṃ pratyayatā*), and that which is dependently co-arisen is referred to as a "designation having recourse" (*upādāya-prajñapti*) to beings that are dependently co-arisen. In the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra school, this "designation" is understood to be a construct within consciousness (*vijñapti*).[2] The way things dependently co-arise—as designations without real existence—is there related to the notion that the entire world exists only in virtue of being an expression and construct of consciousness. Thus, both in Mādhyamika and in the development from Mādhyamika to Yogācāra, dependent co-arising retains the central position.

But while Mādhyamika attempts to thematize dependent co-arisen

being, it remains primarily a philosophy of emptiness and non-being. As a philosophy of emptiness, its salient features are refutation and negation. The reasoning of Nāgārjuna in his *Stanzas on the Middle* is consistently aimed at refutation. That which is negated and declared to be empty is selfhood, that is, *svabhāva*, "own-being." In the invocational verse at the beginning of *The Stanzas on the Middle*, the eight negations of "no-arising, no passing away, no going forth, no coming back, etc." are articulated because it is in denying essence to things and in affirming their non-being that true reality becomes manifest. *The Stanzas on the Middle* are permeated with "a hundred negations and a thousand denials," and negation is indeed the principal feature of Mādhyamika.

But if there were nothing but negation, Mādhyamika would be simply nihilism (*nāstivāda*). Emptiness does not, as is often thought, mean nihilism. As scholars have begun to stress in recent years, Mādhyamika philosophy is not nihilism, but a clarification of dependent co-arising. They are led to this conclusion by the conviction that dependent co-arising is the fundamental theme running through all of Buddhism, both ancient and modern, but that dependent co-arising must at some point relate to emptiness. Mādhyamika did not simply take over the primitive notion of dependent co-arising in a one-dimensional, horizontal perspective. Such a perspective does not allow us to see the significance of the Mahāyāna reversal of thinking through emptiness.

It is certainly true that dependent co-arising refers in some sense to an ordered and sequential understanding of beings in some sense. When we speak of conditioned or conditioning things, we designate them as having being. Accordingly, dependent co-arising is the being of transmigration. The Chinese translators wisely translated the Sanskrit term for transmigration, *saṃsāra*, as "birth-and-death" (*sheng-szu* 生死), since, as the cause of conditional existence, dependent co-arising is the activity of being born and dying, an activity both conditioned by the past and itself conditioning the future. Precisely at the moment when grasping (*grāha*) at something that conditions and something that is conditioned originates, one enters the bondage of the birth-death cycle. It is because everyday living and dying are enmeshed in grasping and attachment that life becomes a transmigratory wandering. This does not mean, however, that for Mādhyamika the meaning of dependent co-arising is to be found simply in the birth-death cycle.

The reason why dependent co-arising cannot simply be equated with the birth-death cycle is that it also includes dependently co-arisen being that transcends the cycle. If the two are not clearly distinguished, one can scarcely conceive of awakening. Birth-and-death exist even

for a buddha. Bodhisattvas venture to reject final cessation to dwell in the birth-death cycle. The deeds performed by the truly awakened in the realm of birth-death are termed "dependently arisen suchness" and constitute the dependent co-arisen nature of awakening. Such dependent co-arising is not at all the same as the empirical birth-death cycle grounded on selfhood and essence.

At its basic level, dependent co-arising is movement from cause to result and in this sense refers to the conditioned states brought about by an agent. However, one must keep in mind that such a causal relationship is not the action of an essential subjective reality upon an equally essential objective reality. Dependent co-arising does not indicate any essentialistic causal relationship in which some substantial entity with its own being acts upon another equally substantial entity. Rather, the true meaning of dependent co-arising is found in the negation of all substantial reality, of all subjective selfhood. The meaning of the traditional expressions, "dependent upon this" (*idaṃ pratyayatā*) or "if this exists, then that exists" is not that when one essence exists, then some other essence exists apart from it. On the contrary, it is because both this and that do *not* exist as essences that, when this exists, then that also exists. Dependent co-arising refers to a causal relationship wherein no essence is present at any time in either cause or result. Thus, the sentence, "Nothing arises from itself; nothing arises from another," in *The Stanzas on the Middle* (1.1) is not intended to refute arising. It is a negation only of essences that might be explained as "from themselves" or "from others." And this in turn is an affirmation that only dependent co-arising exists.

Dependent co-arising is the non-existence of essences, of selfhood. It describes a relationship whereby that which does exist derives its being not from itself, but from "another." If then this "other" were the other of a selfhood independent from the self, then indeed there would exist that one essence. Even in the case of the "other power" of Pure Land Buddhism, this "other" must be seen as an absolute other. Only when the duality of self and other has disappeared in the sole presence of an inconceivable and unfathomable power is there an "other power" that is not self. If I existed as an essence, there would be no inconceivability. I would reside permanently in my own conceivable thoughts, entangled in my own affairs. I would imagine, discriminate, and carry forth my purposes. I would be joyful or sad, fearful or secure. And when an other confronts such an essential "me," then it, too, would be enclosed within the boundaries of that "I" who constantly deliberates and discriminates, and would not therefore be truly distinct from me. That which is absolutely other must transcend the polarity of self and other,

without negating my deliberations and discriminations. If my deliberations and discriminations did not exist at all, then their transcendence and the other that transcends them would be meaningless. An absolute other would be the root source for the deliberating and discriminating self, inconceivable only in the sense that one cannot see one's own back.

Dependent co-arising signifies both the negation of essence and the validation of such deliberations and discriminations. The dynamic flow from cause to result remains even after negating essentialist birth-and-death and all essentialist causality. It is the performance of dependently co-arising actions that brings about the birth-death cycle, the result of which is the experience of suffering. And it is also the performance of dependent co-arising actions that brings about a liberation and cessation wherein there is nothing at all to be attained. In an "I" who, constantly and from moment to moment is liberated from being to non-being, who is born and dies at every instant, birth-and-death are not the birth-and-death of an I; they are not the birth-and-death of anything. Still, in virtue of the negation of an essentialist subject underlying the birth-death cycle, birth and passing away, coming and going do in fact exist. The term essence denotes an absolute in itself that is the subject of the various activities. But even in their self-enclosing structure essences do change into other essences. They are interdependent.

In contrast, the term dependent co-arising as "arising only in dependence,"—without essence—allows one to inquire into the mutual relationships of all beings. In this sense, the realm of mutual relatedness, of absolute relativity, constitutes an "absolute" otherness over against selfhood and essence. Such an absolute is not a separate world apart from me, but an absolute in which my interrelated activity has absolute meaning. For there is absolute meaning within dependently co-arisen relativity, and the existence wherein from moment to moment one is liberated from being to non-being and identifies living with dying is as such an absolute existence. In virtue of the penetrating light of emptiness, the dependently co-arising cycle of birth and death, just as it is, is transformed into an absolute existence. However, inasmuch as it is the historical world of the birth-death cycle wherein the great path from practice to attainment occurs, it necessarily exists as conditioned being, and thus as being.

The Identity of Dependent Co-Arising with Emptiness: Their Complementarity as Seen in Nāgārjuna's Writings

This is how the Mādhyamika philosophers understood dependent

co-arising. Emptiness and refutation cannot be regarded as secondary. As explained above, in the Mādhyamika understanding of emptiness dependent co-arising as an ordered and systematic understanding of being, directly and just as it is, is emptiness. The identity of non-being with being, the identity of emptiness with dependent co-arising, is the fundamental standpoint of Mādhyamika. Negated non-being and dependently co-arising being are unified in a manner inconceivable within the one-dimensional contexts of being or non-being. This is how one should understand the identification the Chinese San-lun thinkers made between the overthrowing of falsehood and the manifestation of truth (*hsien-cheng chi p'o-hsieh* 顯正即破邪). It is not that the overthrowing of falsehood in itself signifies the manifestation of truth, but that the ovrthrowing heralds a constructive step toward the positive manifestation of truth. Conversely, one might say that the identity of the overthrowing of falsehood with the manifestation of truth results from the methodological necessity of overcoming falsehood.

This identity of absolutely contradictory non-being and being is not simply an intuitive and mystic synthesis. If it were, it could not be constitutive of conventional speech. By seeing such identity as simply intuitional, one easily falls into thinking that intuition is something mystical, rarefied, and beyond the secular. In contrast, the direct movement from non-being to being and from being to non-being is necessarily encompassed within both non-being and being. Mādhyamika reasoning tries to clarify that movement and must validate and establish a conventionally rational discourse. In the absence of such a reasoned discourse, the enunciation of the identity of non-being with being, and of being with non-being, becomes the raving of a madman. Both explicitly and implicitly Mādhyamika reasoning must function in the conventional realm of being.

Non-being is extremely important in Mādhyamika, but we cannot stop there. The theme of dependent co-arising being is also central to *The Stanzas on the Middle*, but neither can one be satisfied with a system of being alone. Together, emptiness and dependent co-arising constitute an emptiness in which dependent co-arising is empty and a dependent co-arising in which that which is empty dependently co-arises. For this reason *The Heart Scripture* employs the phrase, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." It is not just that form is emptiness, or that emptiness is form. One cannot understand Mādhyamika correctly without first establishing an absolute identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising by simply attending either to emptiness or to dependent co-arising. One must not lean to either side, despite tendencies to elevate one or

the other to a position of superiority. If one loses sight of emptiness and claims that the pervasive principle of Buddhism is dependent co-arising, one has departed from Mahāyāna. Likewise, if one chooses to overemphasize emptiness and thus concentrate on the overthrowing and refutation of falsehood in the manner of the San-lun sect, one falls into a dogmatism that attempts to evade the conventionality of being in the world. Emptiness and dependent co-arising must be understood together as an identity of absolute contradictories.

This identity is particularly clear in the invocational lines of *The Stanzas on the Middle* and *The Sixty Stanzas on True Reasoning*, as well as in the stanzas on the threefold truth in chapter 24 of *The Stanzas on the Middle.* We give the invocational stanzas in English translation, followed by the Sanskrit original:

> Not arising, not passing away;
> Not eternal, not terminable;
> Not one, not many;
> Not coming, not going;
> I pay homage to the Buddha,
> The foremost among teachers,
> Who has taught this dependent co-arising
> In order graciously to uproot all fabrication.
>
> anirodham anutpādam anucchedam aśāśvataṃ/
> anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgamaṃ/
> yaḥ pratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśāmaṃ śivaṃ/
> deśayām āsa saṃbuddhas taṃ vande vadatāṃ varaṃ//

Here in his initial stanza, Nāgārjuna makes reference to dependent co-arising as taught by the Buddha. In the Sanskrit, the term "dependent co-arising" (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is modified by the preceding eight phrases of "not arising, not passing away, and so forth." This points to a dependent co-arising in which negation takes priority. Dependent co-arising is not the production of a result from some kind of really existent, essential cause. Rather it is a dependent co-arising that is not arising, not passing away, not going, not coming. The next phrase, which also modifies "dependent co-arising," "to graciously uproot all fabrication" (*prapañcopaśamaṃ*), points to a dependent co-arising that has passed through the negation of those uprootings. The term fabrication (*prapañca*) refers to the mental production and verbal communication of phenomenal beings, based on the discriminative and constructive activities of conceptualization and judgment. Dependent co-arising

entails the absence of such fabrication by negating sense-patterned knowing that relies on such discrimination and judgment. Therefore, even though dependent co-arising takes place from cause to result, it is not a causal relationship as ordinarily conceived but a causal relationship impervious to judgmental categories. In addition to being the principle for explaining the birth-death cycle, dependent co-arising, as taught by the Buddha, is identified with negation, a negation of fabrication. Consequently, dependent co-arising manifests the nature of reality (*dharmatā*), once reality is seen to be synonymous with emptiness. That is why it is described in the stanza as "gracious" (*śivaṃ*). Insofar as the transitoriness of all things can be described as the reality of what is real or as the emptiness of what is empty, we can also speak of the reality of dependent co-arising. When dependent co-arising is referred to as reality, it indicates an understanding of being as coming into being, not as something essentially present to itself. The characterization of reality as dependent co-arising differs from usual notions of the creation of being in that it is based on a negation of essence through the identification of dependent co-arising with emptiness. A one-dimensional view of dependent co-arising as the birth-death cycle, even if it includes a dynamic tendency toward non-being and is conceived as transcendent and ascendent in orientation, is not a true understanding of dependent co-arising unless it is identified with emptiness. It is because it is enfolded in emptiness that the affirmative understanding of dependent co-arising as the negation of negation signals an eradication of fabrication and thus a truly gracious occurrence. The Buddha honored by Nāgārjuna is precisely the Buddha who taught the identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness.

The invocational stanza of *The Sixty Stanzas on True Reasoning* states:

> The arising and passing away [of all things] is refuted by this reasoning.
> I pay homage to the Sage Lord who has deigned to teach dependent co-arising.[3]

This passage differs little from the one cited above. *The Stanzas on the Middle* again clarifies this theme in its stanza on the threefold truth:

> I have declared that which dependently co-arises to be emptiness. This is a descriptive designation having recourse [to dependent co-arising], and is the middle path.
>
> Yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe/
> sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā//24.18//

Here dependent co-arising is identified with emptiness. One must, however, bear in mind that, although "that which dependently co-arises" is precisely a coming to be, an arising (*samutpāda*) whereby something becomes "other" (*pratītya*), this should not be confused with the origination of essential results from causes as we ordinarily understand these terms. The process of becoming other entails the disappearance of self. Dependent co-arising is mutual relativity and dependence. Established in reliance upon (*apekṣā*) conditions, it entails the absence of self and thus cannot be explained as an opposition of essences. The axiom that "things arise from a cluster of causes and conditions" does not imply that such a "cluster" of causes and conditions constitute essences. If the term cluster denoted only a vague plurality, it would be nothing more than a futile exercise in causal reasoning that fails to pinpoint the cause. The fact that causes and conditions form a cluster and are not reducible to any single specific factor does not mean that they form an arithmetical plurality, but only that they are empty of essence. It is in virtue of their essential emptiness that one can speak of results coming from causes. Therefore, dependent co-arising is identical with emptiness and in the concrete world the dependent co-arising of beings implies their emptiness.

In the phrase, "this [emptiness] is a designation having recourse," the term "designation having recourse" (*upādāyaprajñapti*) indicates something constituted by taking on being and relying on being in the field of emptiness and because of emptiness. "To have recourse" means to adopt being as the material basis (dependently co-arisen being in its one-dimensional, naive sense) on which something is constituted as grounded in emptiness. Just as one cannot swim in an empty pool without water, so, too, emptiness needs to be made concrete by being identified with dependent co-arising, by being brought down to the level of the phenomenal, dependently co-arisen world. Otherwise one could not even talk about emptiness. The term "designation that has recourse" is close in meaning to "the being of dependent co-arising" and is imbued with the connotation of a reinvolvement in the phenomenal world. Therefore, the end of the passage declares that "this is the middle path."

The middle path is the identity of dependent co-arising with emptiness, the identity of emptiness with dependent co-arising. Because being and non-being are identical, the middle path cannot affirm either extreme. Nor can the middle path fall in between the two extremes of being and non-being, either as the non-being of being or as the negation of both being and non-being. It is not that being and non-being are at opposite ends of the same line, the middle path to be located midway between

them. To balance oneself midway between being and non-being is simply a failure to apply the principle of the excluded middle (*anaikāntika-vāda*). The middle path is rather an identification of being with non-being and of non-being with being: being and non-being form a single piece of cloth.

Similarly, in T'ien-t'ai the three truths of the empty, the provisional, and the middle are not originally three separate perspectives that need later somehow to be fused into one. Because the empty is precisely the provisional and the provisional the empty, both the empty and the provisional together constitute the middle path. This middle path is not some third factor apart from the empty and the provisional, and one would be mistaken in regarding the middle path as located somewhere between the empty and the provisional as independent entities.

Candrakīrti's commentary on the above stanza from *The Stanzas on the Middle* is helpful here. He affirms that dependent co-arising itself is emptiness, a designation that has recourse, and the middle path. The last three appellations represent T'ien-t'ai's threefold truth, set within a framework of dependent co-arising. Including dependent co-arising, we end up then with a fourfold arrangement. Here, too, the identity of co-arising with emptiness, of emptiness with "designations that have recourse," remains central. There is here no question of disparate conceptual contents for the four items designated by these terms. On the contrary, the whole point of the stanza is to identity them. Thus, the nineteenth stanza says:

> There is nothing that is not dependently co-arisen.
> Therefore there is nothing that is not empty.
>
> apratītyasamutpanno dharmaḥ kaś cin na vidyate/
> yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaś cin na vidyate//24.19

All things, all beings whatsoever are dependently co-arisen, and because they co-arise dependently, are empty. Here the identification of emptiness and dependent co-arising signifies their unity in reality (*dharma*). It is because such beings are real (*dharma*) that they signify the nature of reality (*dharmatā*).

The last stanza of *Overcoming Vain Discussions* expresses the synonymity of the four themes of stanza eighteen above,—namely, their interrelationship as different aspects (*paryāya*) of the same meaning—by means of the phrase "one meaning" (*eka-artha*).

> I pay homage to the unequalled Buddha, who taught that emptiness,

dependent co-arising, and the middle path are one in meaning.

yaḥ śūnyatāṃ pratītyasamutpādaṃ madhyamāṃ pratipadaṃ ca/
ekārthāṃ nijagāda praṇamāmi tam apratimabuddham//71//

The first half of the stanza in its Tibetan translation reads:

He taught both emptiness and dependent co-arising to be one in meaning as the middle path.

gang zhig stong dang rten 'byung dag/
dbu ma'i lam du don gig par/

The Tibetan makes it clearer that emptiness is identical with dependent co-arising.

Identity as the Suchness of Being: The Immediacy of Dependent Co-arising as One with Emptiness

Dependently co-arisen things as such signify emptiness, just as empty beings indicate the dependent co-arising of being. This identity is what constitutes the middle path and is also referred to as the suchness of being. The suchness of being is basically suchness (*tathatā*) and because being, just as it is, is reality and truth, in later times this phrase, "the suchness of being" (*bhūtatathatā*) became popular, especially in East Asia. The term "suchness," as the words itself suggests, means simply "being such," "being as it is." It does not mean some ground of "reality" existing substantially in the form of either subject or object. The idea of a substantial substratum cannot carry the meaning of suchness, which refers to the flow of transmigration just as it is. In its deep meaning, then, suchness is emptiness identified with dependent co-arising just as it is.

One must not, however, rush into a direct affirmation of a one-dimensional world of the dependently co-arising birth-death cycle. In the final analysis, the dependently co-arising, phenomenal world, the pluralistic world, the transient world of fleeting motion harbors an impetus toward its own negation and a readiness for self-negation. The world of the birth-death cycle must always be despised and rejected; one finds no cause for happiness in it. The world reaches out toward an emptiness that empties its very being. This latent potential for reversal does not imply that the birth-death cycle itself contains the necessary

dynamism for change. The sense of detestation is always driven by something higher, something beyond the one-dimensional, dependently co-arising birth-death cycle and demands a shift of dimensions. But the dynamic thrust must come from something other than immediate being within the life-death cycle, since the one-dimensional, dependently co-arising birth-death cycle is not itself suchness. Just as I was not born of my own will, so the myriad beings do not exist through their own causal efficacy. Being interdependent, they are empty. When the birth-death cycle itself is empty, when there is nothing that exists permanently as its own essence; when, without self identity, all the functions of beings depend upon others, then dependent co-arising is emptiness and emptiness is dependent co-arising. I do not exist, but the fact that I have been born is undeniable. The fact that I am able to strut about so boldly is possible only in virtue of emptiness. The rejection of dependently co-arisen being is provisional, for in becoming empty and non-existent, dependently co-arisen being returns again to existence. It is this second dimension of dependently co-arising being that is identified with suchness.

The dependently co-arising world is imbued with negation, but if one gets stuck in a fixation on being, dependent co-arising is not emptied. And until dependently co-arising being is emptied, it is not suchness. The real is suchness when there is an identification of emptiness and dependent co-arising whereby empty non-being "hollows out" every trace of inner selfhood. The real world cannot carry the true meaning of dependent co-arising until it has permeated being with this self-negating emptiness. Prior to this, dependent co-arising is simply causality as commonly understood: passage from past to future, movement from self to other, demarcation along a continuous chain of being. The simplistic notion of a chain of being does not yield true insight into dependent co-arising. Because this chain of being passes through the negation of emptiness—as a chain that is not a chain—the being that had previously been characterized as the birth-death cycle must now be affirmed as it is. The former idea of being is consumed in emptiness and becomes "subsequently understood" being in light of emptiness. Therefore, suchness is emptiness in the sense of self-transcendence and dependent co-arising in the sense of self-immanence. That which is depicted as "the moon of the suchness of being" is not some kind of final reality beyond our everyday experience of reality. Suchness is present only in emptiness without self-essence, only in the most minimal form of interdependency, only at the vanishing point of being. It is a proleptic suchness, expressed in Buddhist doctrine as "a phantom-trace" or "a lightning flash." A phantom-trace is not real, but it does have form, visible configuration, and activity.

Suchness is likened to seeing the red of flowers and the green of willows. The description, "the willows are green and the flowers red" signifies an emptiness, a natural spontaneity in the real world whereby green and red appear "suddenly" as a phenomenal "given" or fortuitous (*āgantuka*) event. There is no pattern of fixed causal necessity. Dependent co-arising does not mean that green is an inherent property of willows and red of flowers, however common such causal relationships may be on the level of being. Dependent co-arising is the identity of emptiness and suchness, the natural spontaneity of the great path from practice (cause) to attainment (result). Causal relationships are necessary but they do not lead to freedom or spontaneity. One who singlemindedly and earnestly follows the path of causal necessity walks a small path focused on the future and closed off to retreat. This is because such a path is not empty. The fortuitous and adventitious exist only in virtue of their being empty in themselves. It is when we are grateful for a fortuitous grace that we are happy in our own emptiness and valuelessness. Without our knowing where it comes from or how it is brought about, that fortuitous grace is real only within suchness. This is why salvation is experienced as a fortuitous event: it is true reality as suchness.

In contrast, passion and sin are only incidental incursions from without. In Buddhism, sin cannot be ascribed to a single cause like Adam's original sin, as if it were the first in a causal series of essences along a horizontal plane leading to us. Sin and the salvation of the sinner from sin are nothing other than suchness inasmuch as the dependent co-arising of sin is itself empty. The description of salvation as adventitious means simply that it is other-dependent. Other-power is the emptiness of what co-arises dependently. To say that salvation occurs objectively by means of other-power is to say that it is adventitious and thus empty. It can never refer to an other confronting the subject as an object in a one-dimensional, dependently co-arising birth-death cycle. If other-power is not suchness but a substantial reality, then it is no more than another instance of self-power, a self-power fated to follow an unending path in quest of an unattainable ideal. It is not suchness in the identification of dependent co-arising with emptiness, because it relegates suchness and emptiness to an eternal future. It is only when the self-essence of self-power is finally deconstructed, when the self exists only in non-being and other-dependency, that other-power becomes the emptiness in which nothing of self remains. Salvation is then Tathāgata, the coming (*agata*) of suchness (*tatha*) into the world and the going out (*gata*) of suchness to cessation. It is not the one-dimensional coming and going of the birth-death cycle, since with suchness coming and going are both empty and fortuitous. It is in

this coming and going, where dependent co-arising and emptiness are one, that salvation lies.[4]

On the Term Identity (即): Not a Synthesis in One-Dimensional Co-arising, but a Shift Beyond the Polarity of Being and Non-Being

The foundational standpoint of Mādhyamika is that dependent co-arising is identical with emptiness, that this identity is the middle path of suchness. Here lie the origins of awakening, deliverance, and salvation. In China, the term *chi* (即), is used to express the identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness as suchness. In general, the word *chi* means a unity of absolute contradictory things, a synthesis of contradictory notions, like one and many, self and other. Life and death are brought together in such an identity. In Buddhism, one instant (*kṣaṇa*) does not simply denote the smallest unit of time, but is also used to signify this synthetic identity of life and death. All phenomenal beings are "destroyed from instant to instant."

If this identity is understood as an idealistic or a teleological, that is, a materialistic synthesis, the Mādhyamika meaning of identity is lost. There is a synthesis of opposites in both Hegel's idealism and Marx's teleological materialism, where the logic of world history is depicted in terms of a dialectical synthesis. But these syntheses take no note of emptiness. No matter how profound the processes involved, they are unable to escape the birth-death cycle and to transcend the dependently co-arising world. There is no truly absolute contradiction in them and no truly absolute synthesis of opposites.

The term *chi* implies a transcending of the realm of world history and denotes unity in a transhistorical realm. The Mādhyamika notion of identity does not occur within the birth-death cycle of dependent co-arising but as a co-arising with emptiness. In other words, the very framework of such dependent co-arising must be eradicated. This identity is between reason and what is beyond reason; it transcends any reasoning that might encompass both identity and opposition. But is such an identity really possible? To be sure, it is inconceivable within the limits of history or logic in that it transcends the frame of logic and cannot be reached by reasoning. This is why is has been thought to be attainable only through direct insight in quiet meditation. *The Diamond-Cutter Scripture* clearly teaches that the realization of the identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness is a matter of direct

insight when it says that "this understanding arises when one has no abiding point."

But if we regard such insight only as something that lies beyond reasoning and is attained through direct insight, it no longer takes place in the world as a worldly cultural reality involving history, society, and reason. It must be kept within the realm of logical reasoning. If it were sufficient to take such insight into the identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness as an entirely unmediated matter of direct insight, one could scarcely recognize any conceptual development in Eastern thought. The Prajñāpāramitā phrase itself, "there arises this understanding," could not have occurred. The Mādhyamika standpoint of the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising is located in a reflection within the realm of reason of what lies beyond reason. If this were not the case, there would be no reason for later Mādhyamika thinkers to have exerted such effort to resurrect conventional discourse. But in fact it was through their efforts that Mādhyamika was recognized as a logical procedure, a point we shall return to later.

Summation

The identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness can be approached from either direction. On the one hand, dependent co-arising means that all beings are not independent (*svātantrika*) and self-existing (*ātman*) things, but only transient beings brought about by the constellation of a cluster of causes. This no-self and absence of any independent self underlying transient being is the emptiness of things. The reality of being itself becomes non-existent through such an analysis of being as dependently co-arising; living is identified with dying. On the other hand, this emptying and negating of things does not mean that things do not exist at all; non-being is not nothingness. Emptiness signifies only the absence of essence. The evolving, changing world understood through insight into emptiness is not meant to be negated. Beings that exist in emptiness exist just as they are. The dependent co-arising of being as suchness is connected with emptiness and, when considered from the notion of ultimate and conventional meaning, as will be explained below, can be described as "worldly convention only." If examined from the Yogācāra notion of "other-dependent arising," it can also be termed "dependent co-arising only." That whose essence is denied does exist in conjunction with causes.

This restored and purified second dimension of dependent co-arising is indeed wondrous (*āścarya*). Because of emptiness, the existence of beings together with their causes is ineffable (*avācya*) and inconceivable (*acintya*). In truth, the phenomenal world is first and foremost a beautiful world, and phenomenal being is a being wondrous and enjoyable beyond description. But this is not the beauty or joy of the one-dimensional birth-death cycle, which consists only in unlimited suffering. The wonder, beauty, and joy of the dependently co-arising world is entirely due to its being free of essence and empty. Beauty ends where concrete individuals stress their essential being. True beauty has no meaning in this case. The self-advocacy of beauty is the suicide of beauty; the self-assertion of goodness ends up as evil. True beauty is first appreciated in the awareness that beauty "is not intrinsically beautiful." Any independently existing (*svātantrika*) beauty is simply a projection of one's own desire for self-assertion. In the struggle between competing desires, only what profits me appears as beautiful. True beauty lies rather in the negation of beauty, in the negating of self-benefit, in a benefiting others wherein the self is eradicated. Only then is the world, just as it is, replete with beauty. The absence of essence and the emptiness of beauty does not alter the fact that beauty presents itself to us as dependently co-arisen. To be sure, the resurrection of the true self from within the negation of self represents the beauty and enjoyment of reality. This is the meaning of the identity of being and non-being in emptiness, wherein we still respond to actual conditions and things.

Whether we approach matters from the perspective of dependent co-arising or from emptiness, the two are always identical and mutually defining. Reality as that which is without essence—whether because dependently co-arisen or because empty—denotes an absence of subjective selfhood. But by itself consideration of this identity does not exhaust the meaning of Mādhyamika philosophy. Accordingly, we shall turn our attention next to the relationship between ultimate meaning and worldly convention. One cannot directly identify being, which exists as dependently co-arisen, with empty non-being, which is not simply nothing. The two are absolute opposites. This leads us to an examination of the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention, which are also absolutely opposing notions. As we shall see, the reason emptiness and dependent co-arising are identified as opposites is that there is a dichotomy between ultimate meaning and worldly convention.

Chapter 2

The Two Truths

The Two Truths of Ultimate Meaning and Worldly Convention: Not Merely a Negative Use of Logical Refutation

The other central doctrine of Mādhyamika philosophy is the teaching on the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. If the relationship between emptiness and dependent co-arising is the warp running tautly through the fabric of Mādhyamika thought, the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention comprise the woof. It is the weaving together of the two that makes up Mādhyamika philosophy. Each encompasses the entirety of beings in the world. Mādhyamika is not a layered construct in which these two themes build on each other, but even though they seem to have nothing to do with each other, they complement one another. Each theme from within its own structure and its own dynamic orientation analyzes 'being' in the world from a unique perspective. At the same time the two cannot but interact because they have to do with one and the same world—in such fashion that the understanding of one issues in the understanding of the other.

We mentioned in the last chapter that this Mādhyamika teaching of the two truths was central to the doctrinal stance of the San-lun school, the Chinese version of Mādhyamika. The relationship between emptiness and dependent co-arising is not, however, in clear evidence there. Moreover, the San-lun notion of two truths does not seem to be interwoven with any awareness of the identity between emptiness and dependent co-arising. When Chi-tsang (549-623), the founder of San-lun, adopts the notion of emptiness to present his refutations of views in *The Wondrous Meaning of the Three Texts*, he describes his refutation as "overthrowing falsehood, i.e., manifesting truth." We have already noted that notions of falsehood and truth are inadequate for an understanding of Mādhyamika, a point to which we will return later. Here

we need only call attention to the fact that, although the *The Wondrous Meaning of the Three Texts* speaks of "overthrowing falsehood, i.e., manifesting truth," in point of fact Chi-tsang stressed the refutation of falsehood, focusing on emptiness and non-being.

Some think that Nāgārjuna's disciple Āryadeva so concentrated his attention on the incisiveness of refutation that he led later Mādhyamikans into a misunderstanding of emptiness. Whether it is correct to characterize Āryadeva as overly negative is a matter of some doubt,[1] but this is clearly the tendency in the thinking of the Chinese San-lun sect. In the three authoritative San-lun texts, namely, *The Treatise in Twelve Categories, The Treatise on the Middle* (the Chinese translation of Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas* together with Piṅgala's commentary), and *The Treatise in a Hundred Stanzas,* (although one might have to treat *The Treatise in Twelve Categories* separately)—Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle* is generally regarded as demonstrating emptiness through a dialectics of refutation. The question of whether or not Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle* focused exclusively on refutation was debated both in Indian Buddhist scholarly circles and among the Mādhyamika thinkers of Tibet, who were the direct heirs to the Indian school.[2] There was no question that the *Treatise on the Middle* was universally regarded as "foundational" and as Nāgārjuna's key work, but the point of controversy was whether or not one could regard even this text as employing simply a dialectics of refutation and negation. Since Āryadeva's *Treatise in a Hundred Stanzas* was believed to have been composed with the purpose of refuting heretical views, it is understandable why it was seen to be focused on refutation. And since, moreover, the San-lun thinkers took these texts to be authoritative, they naturally accorded the highest place to refutation, conforming in the process to the current Chinese fashion of "pure conversation" (*ch'ing-tan*).

In contrast, the Ssu-lun school (the Four Text sect), which was established by adding *The Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom* (*Ta-chih-tu lun*) to the three above treatises, sought to give more weight to the affirmation of bodhisattva practice and to the validation of conventional meaning. In addition to the *Stanzas on the Middle*, there were several other important texts by Nāgārjuna, collectively referred to in the Indian-Tibetan Buddhist tradition as "The Collection on Logic" (*yuktikāya*). They numbered either five or six texts (they did not include *The Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom*). These texts were all but completely neglected by the San-lun sect, which granted supreme and sole authority to the *Treatise on the Middle* in its Chinese translation by Kumārajīva with Piṅgala's commentary. As noted above,

they read this work as a piece of negative refutation and were bedazzled by its dialectical method of argumentation. Even though the San-lun thinkers held doctrines like the two truths to be important, they understood them as negative in intent and put the priority on overthrowing of the views of others, without examining the meaning of the two truths very deeply.

By understanding the doctrine of the identity of emptiness with dependent co-arising and the doctrine of the two truths as the interweaving threads of Mādhyamika philosophy, I hope to illumine the central importance and necessity of Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the two truths. I hope to make it clear that the formulation of Mādhyamika's procedure of logical reasoning goes beyond mere refutation to a concern for the valid establishment of worldly convention.

Explanations of the Two Truths: The Basic Theme as it Appears in the Scriptures and Commentaries

We are not certain just when the terms ultimate meaning and worldly convention first were used, but a primitive form of such a distinction appears quite early in the Āgamas and the Nikāyas. They are referred to explicitly as "the two truths" in a number of well-known passages from such Prajñāpāramitā scriptures as the *Scripture on the Wisdom of the Benevolent King* and in texts like as *The Scripture on Cessation*. In the commentaries, they are discussed in the early *Extensive Abhidharma Commentary* and the later *Treatise on the Perfection of Truth*. But it was probably Nāgārjuna himself who first reflected deeply on the two truths and formulated them as a central doctrinal theme. After him almost all Buddhist thinkers, whatever their affiliation, had to come to terms with them.

In their most obvious sense, the two terms worldly convention and ultimate meaning correspond respectively to the ideas of the worldly (*laukika*) and of the world-transcendent, or that which is beyond the world (*lokottara*). The world of ordinary, everyday consciousness is here referred to as the worldly, which includes not only the biological world but also the human world of culture and society. The higher, transcendent world is regarded as a religious, numinous world, and ultimate meaning is established as a negation of the everyday world, beyond it and transcendent to it.

The notions corresponding to worldly convention and ultimate

meaning do not stop at this account. The multiplicity of doctrinal evolutions reflects an abundant richness of historical and societal conditions and takes on the contours of a host of different religious and cultural concerns.

There are many terms related in meaning to the two truths within Buddhist doctrinal history. For example, the doctrine of the Buddha bodies offers clear similarities with the structure of the two truths, and an examination of this doctrine may help to elucidate the meaning of the two truths. Liberation from suffering, the final goal of Buddhism, was the central concern of almost all Indian thinking. In Buddhism, liberation is attained by becoming an awakened one or buddha. At the point of awakening, a buddha is wisdom concretized in perceptible form. Relatively early in the history of Buddhism, a distinction was drawn between the Buddha's body as "Dharma body" and as "perceptible form body." The original Dharma body is awakening as pure wisdom, as reality, as principle. This Dharma body is without form or shape and cannot be seen. At the same time, the perceptible form body was regarded as an awakened one in the material form of a physical body, so that, even while abiding as the Dharma body, that reality could be expressed conceptually and talked about in language.

After the physical body of Śākyamuni had passed away, his disciples, unable to endure their master's absence, conceived the idea that his physical body was really an incarnation of the Dharma body, meant to represent the reality of awakening. In this way a twofold Buddha body was distinguished, but even under this double aspect, the Buddha body was described as the stage of attainment (*phala-avasthā*) brought about by the previous stage of bodhisattva practice. In the stage of practice (*hetv-avasthā*), one can conceive of two analogues to the Buddha body: wisdom (*jñāna*) and skillful means (*upāya*). The prevalent view in Buddhism is that as long as wisdom and skillful means are incomplete, true attainment of awakening remains imperfect. Buddhist doctrine on wisdom is abundant, but always includes skillful means. Conversely, Buddhism's orientation to practice and implementation is that of a skillful means reflecting wisdom. The attainment of Buddhahood must come about as a combination of these two inseparable elements. If at the stage of attainment we differentiate the Dharma body of ultimate meaning from the perceptible form body of worldly convention, wisdom belongs to the realm of ultimate meaning and skillful means to worldly convention. Wisdom is joined to the essence body of awakening as its principle and basic reality, while skillful means corresponds to the Buddha's physical body as an earthly savior. But even this is merely a provisional distinction, since ultimately there is no ranking of higher

and lower between wisdom and skillful means, between ultimate meaning and worldly convention, or between the accumulation of merit and wisdom (*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*). The opposites are like the two wheels on a cart.

In the final analysis, then, there is no distinction that would give priority either to ultimate meaning or to worldly convention. It is not immediately clear [from our perspective] how this is possible, inasmuch as in its basic denotation the term "ultimate meaning" always takes precedence over worldly convention. If we consider the stage of the attainment of awakening to be ultimately meaningful, the contrasting stage of practice becomes worldly convention. This stage of practice is the path (*mārga*), in contrast to the stage of attainment. Both as wisdom and as skillful means, this path is conventional. Since the path is a human construct (*kṛtrimatva*), it always remains worldly and conventional. As implemented on the human level, the path is never itself a "cessation," and hence the path remains worldly and conventional while ultimate meaning applies to cessation. This is why it is taught that worldly convention is antecedent (*pūrva*), while ultimate meaning is subsequent (*paścāt*).[3] The path must precede the attainment of cessation. The scriptures teach that one leads sentient beings to maturation (*paripācayati*) through worldy convention, while one leads them to liberation (*vimocayati*) through ultimate meaning. Here again we find an attempt to clarify a relationship of priority between the two truths. This is the royal road (*mahārājapatha*), the great path from practice to attainment described as progressing from worldly convention to ultimate meaning. It is the path along which sentient beings realize buddhahood.

Seen from another angle, the progression from practice to attainment is an entirely human construct, a mere worldly convention. As the implementation of human practice, the entire process to cessation through the cultivation of the truth of the path is worldly and conventional. Even though it be the royal road from practice to attainment, it exists as dependently co-arisen. As will be explained below, ultimate meaning is always transcendent to and separate from worldly convention. Even if there is a progression from the path to cessation, cessation always shines radiantly at the very inception of the path. In true cessation it is as if there were no path and no cessation. The path of practice never comes to a term. In fact one cannot even say whether its goal is cessation or not. Meantime—to use an expression employed above—all human affairs are caught in the context of a one-dimensional, dependently co-arising cycle of birth and death where all avenues are closed off. In this context, the wisdom and skillfull means needed to realize buddhahood are unattainable. All human beings are conditioned and nothing

absolute exists at all. Since all beings are worldly and conventional even on the path, final absolute meaning is completely other. Within the boundaries of this world everything is open to despair in that worldly convention is completely dark and blinded to ultimate meaning. In the matter of ultimate meaning, the function of causality falls away; there is no great path and everything leads to despair. Whatever we speak of, be it wisdom or skillful means, awakening as Dharma body or as perceptible form body—it is nothing more than conventional discourse (*vyavahāra*). The true cessation of awakening transcends the world of co-arisen discourse, it is without cause and result. This is why we may speak of ultimate meaning in terms of emptiness. In contrast to the world of speech and reasoning, ultimate meaning is always ineffable (*avācyatva*) and silent (*tūṣṇīṃbhāva*).

The completely conventional nature of the progression from the path to cessation, from worldly convention to ultimate meaning, also follows logically from the fact that the truths of worldly convention and ultimate meaning are defined sometimes as skillful means, or perfected skillful-means (*pratipatty-upāya*). As explained in the *Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, a Yogācāra text, and in Sthiramati's *Commentary*, the reality of the traditional four truths is that of causality, described as liberation in the Lesser Vehicle. In contrast to the notions of path and cessation that appear in the four truths, the path of liberation in the great vehicle is found in the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. Blunted (*audārika*) conventional truth refers to "the skillful means that perfect universal wisdom," but this is the path of practice and not the perfection of attainment. The term *blunted* in this context does not mean merely defective but also horizontally "spread out" and thus having to do with "universal wisdom." Conversely, sharp (*sūkṣma*) ultimate meaning indicates a "skillful means to sever all obstacles," namely, all the obstacles encountered by a bodhisattva, including the obstacle to universal knowing. Such a severance of obstacles is incisive, vertically sharp, and profound. The severance of obstacles implies for a bodhisattva not only a cutting off of the passions, but, by severing the obstacle to knowing, the ability to entrust oneself freely to the passionate, defiled world. In considering the truth of ultimate meaning as the severance of obstacles encountered by a bodhisattva, we must not overlook the non-abandonment of the birth-death cycle. Even here the two truths remain skillful means. Even the truth of ultimate meaning is a skillful means for removing obstacles.

As described in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, there is a truth of ultimate meaning, but as long as it is reckoned among skillful means, it cannot really be ultimately meaningful. The progression

from worldly convention to ultimate meaning is no more than a verbal model, while true ultimate meaning, being ineffable, always eludes verbalization. Ultimate meaning is always empty and that emptiness, as shown in *The Scripture Elucidated by Vimalakīrti*, is silent. Worldly convention and ultimate meaning always relate in such a way that ultimate meaning slips the bonds of worldly convention. Whenever one posits something called "ultimate meaning" in contrast to worldly convention, ultimate meaning tumbles from its throne, self-destructs, and becomes worldly and conventional. The very positing of an ultimate meaning is an attempt philosophically to validate its self-essence (*ātman*). In most philosophical thinking, such a self-essence (*ātman*) is held to be ultimate, at least in the sense that an "I am" is regarded as true in an ultimate sense. But what exists as a self inevitably tends to become worldly and conventional. To the degree such a self is posited, ultimate meaning as self becomes conventional inasmuch as it operates within a subject-object dichotomy.

The world of dependent co-arising is not simply the birth-death cycle, but at the same time leads to liberation. It is not simply a transcendent "going beyond," but at the same time involves itself again in the world. Yet such reengagement cannot but be worldly and conventional. Because emptiness is ultimate meaning, the world in which one reengages oneself, where emptiness is identified provisionally with dependent co-arising, can itself be ultimately meaningful just as it is. Meanwhile, insofar as it is expressed in language, that is, insofar as selfhood is reconstituted, it remains worldly and conventional. Reengagement in the world is a restoration of selfhood, and the being of selfhood cannot but be worldly and conventional. This is the meaning of such sayings as "the willows are green and the flowers red." This is more than an everyday description of the colors of plants; it implies a recognition of their dependently co-arisen "selfhood," restored through insight into their emptiness as essential beings. Still, affirming the conventional description of the willows as green is quite different from "silent" ultimate meaning. As long as one remains within the limitations of language, there is no way to avoid saying that the willows are green. It is not that one is blindly compelled to say so. There is both reason and need for talking this way. Far from being an irrational activity, speech is spontaneous and natural, and this is how the truly dependently co-arisen regains its selfhood. The restoration of selfhood in turn implies the conventional nature of ultimate meaning. Ultimately meaningful dependent co-arising, in which emptiness is identical with dependent co-arising, becomes a conventional dependent co-arising, in which dependent co-arising is identical with emptiness.

The Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*nairātmya*) is a negation of self as an absolute reality that is mistakenly supposed to be the pride of an ultimately meaningful existence. It is not a negation of the worldly and conventional reality of selfhood. The self cannot be real in any ultimate sense; as existence constantly subject to change, it is simply empty. Because it is empty of essence, the self is spoken of as dependently co-arisen. Insofar as I remain myself, therefore, I cannot escape dependent co-arising or transcend it. No-self is not a negation of the dependently co-arisen self, empty of essence. It is a negation of an illusory self taken to exist essentially and finally. To suppose otherwise is to demolish conventional meaning and render it completely invalid by the notions of no-self and emptiness. All the conventional discourse in terms of which we speak and think, whether in preaching, in listening to doctrine, or in following the path of practice, would come to naught. Practice and doctrinal discourse are always conventional skillful means. Skillful means (*upāya*), despite the fact that they actually "approach" (*upa-aya*) and encircle truth, are not themselves truth. There is no perfected state of any ultimately meaningful selfhood. The identity of truth and skillful means can only be validated by contrasting the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising.

To affirm worldly convention as an embodiment of skillful means does not therefore imply a rejection of the doctrines of no-self or emptiness. The doctrine of no-self is a judgment passed on a self imagined in some form or other to be a final reality. It is a negation of the mistaken idea that one can seek repose in an absolutely meaningful world beyond worldly convention. If there were such a final reality in the form of a self—*ātman*—we would have to refer to it as God. This would amount to the Indian teaching that the world was created by the Almighty *Īśvara*, from whom all things come, and that I am saved by becoming *ātman* through vision of or union with the Almighty. The doctrine of no-self in Buddhism rejects the idea of a God who, as *ātman*, is obliged to leave the divine realms and engage the world, and it does so precisely because of its notion of no-self. The negation of God follows from the differentiation of ultimate meaning from worldly convention. An ultimately meaningful God cannot exist; God must be worldly and conventional. At the same time, emptiness does not seek to negate the existence of God as a conventional description, since, in the last analysis, ultimate meaning is mute silent and ineffable. Conventional discourse, with its words, logic, and reasoning, may be valid only on the level of convention, but is not for that reason simply to be negated. It is the dependently co-arising realm of reengagement that simultaneously opens up the path to transcendence in a dependently co-arising fashion.

The Two Truths as Conducive Teachings and Conducive Principles: The Inadequacy of the San-lun Understanding

As mentioned above, the two truths played an important role in San-lun thinking where they were aligned with the themes of the "eight negations," the "middle path," and "destroying falsehood, i.e., manifesting truth." That the two truths became a dominant theme within the San-lun school is hardly surprising. As Stcherbatsky notes, "the Mādhyamikans were the originators of the doctrine of two truths which they probably contrasted with the 'four truths' of the Hīnayāna" (*Concept of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, p. 165). Chi-tsang himself composed a work entitled *The Meaning of the Two Truths*, and in *The Wondrous Meaning of the Three Treatises* also treats the three San-lun treatises, affirming that each text in its distinctive fashion issues in the two truths. He specifically states that the docrinal theme of *The Treatise on the Middle* is the two truths.

Still, he sums up the pervasive concern of the teaching of these three treatises in the phrase, "overthrowing falsehood, i.e., manifesting truth" (*hsien-cheng chi p'o-hsieh* 顯正即破邪). The overthrowing of falsehood directs attention to negative reasoning, but even the San-lun thinkers differentiated manifested "truth" into basic truth and useful truth. Basic truth was described as "the true mark of all things, ineffable and inconceivable, prior to any differentiation between reality and convention," while useful truth is "the forcing of truth into conventional words, although it neither exists nor not exists." Reality is always beyond language, without name and apart from all speech. Because, as sentient beings, we have no access to enlightenment in the formless and nameless truth, we are forced to employ verbal descriptions and establish the two truths of reality (ultimate meaning) and worldly convention. That which can be described as neither reality nor convention is "basic" truth; all forcing of truth into words is truth at work as "useful."

In this context, both truths are considered useful; both are human and conditioned. As explained above, this amounts to seeing the two truths as skillful means. Here, too, the truth of ultimate meaning is actually affirmed not to be ultimate meaning. This would seem to be why the San-lun school distinguished the two truths into conducive teachings and conducive principles. The distinguishing feature of San-lan teaching is its emphasis on conducive teachings. Conducive principles treat the two truths in regard to the content and reality of their objects, while conducive teachings refer to the two truths as enunciated only in the words of Śākyamuni. The San-lun masters argued that if

the two truths apply to conducive principles, then, even though their content and reality be taken to be non-dual, ineffable, and inconceivable, one would fall into dualistic discrimination and begin to imagine that there is something to be attained. The teaching of the two truths then is nothing more than a skillful means or method, a medicine presented to cure the illness and bring about enlightenment. It is in this sense then that the San-lun thinkers admitted that their three treatises all "teach the two truths."

But is it true that the two truths are nothing more than a remedy? Do the two truths not go beyond a conventional strategy to "teach" the real truth of emptiness in order to demolish views about being, and to teach the conventional truth of being in order to demolish attachment to the view of emptiness?

This San-lun notion is not the doctrine of the two truths here presented as the foundational standpoint of Nāgārjuna and his Mādhyamika philosophy. In fact, ultimate meaning is emptiness itself. Emptiness is ineffable and inconceivable; it is silence. The term truth is applied to the two truths because, insofar as they are empty, they are true, not merely because they are an expedient, conditioned, conventional truth—a forced verbalization of truth. Everything that can be expressed in language belongs to language. The reasoning that asserts that the two truths are simply "a forcible imputation of names" can be also applied to the San-lun doctrine of the overthrowing of falsehood and the manifesting of truth. The two truths are not simply an accommodated wisdom belonging to an inferior level of manifest truth. They are themselves the manifestation of truth. Indeed, an important reason why the two truths were taught, as will be discussed below, was that they were seen as flowing from the doctrine enunciated by the Buddha. In this sense, they are an attempt to clarify logical thinking, and as such are dependently co-arisen. This does not mean that they are confined to dependent co-arising or belong to the merely conventional; they are the two truths precisely because they also carry the meaning of emptiness. The doctrine of the two truths implies a truth of ultimate meaning in contrast to the truth of worldly convention. If they were simply non-empty, conventional, useful verbalizations, there would be no exigency for any truth of ultimate meaning. The Buddha's teaching can also take its place within the realm of reason and history, that is, within the birth-death cycle, but in that case it remains confined to the conventional. There are no two truths apart from the struggle to encompass the truth of ultimate meaning in the conditioned contexts of reason and history. Each of these two truths is useful, and as such true; each is true, and as such useful. The two truths are simultaneously

dependently co-arising and empty. Indeed it was in virtue of insight into the two truths that Nāgārjuna was able to identify emptiness with dependent co-arising. Put conversely, emptiness is not simply the silence of ultimate meaning, but is also the actual functioning of worldly convention; dependent co-arising is not simply conventional, but is the dependent co-arising of awakening to ultimate meaning.

In the San-lun school the two truths were regarded merely as conducive teachings, as a medicine prescribed for an illness. They were "a forcible imposition of names." This implies an ascendent logic of transcendence. The San-lun thinkers concentrated their attention on "sentient beings who desire escape," that is, who try to flee into cessation. It was in this ascendent context that they spoke of "becoming enlightened through the two truths."

But logical reasoning is not only ascendent. True logical thinking is also simultaneously descent and a reengagement in the world. It is not illogical or unreasonable to speak of descent. Even though all avenues to ultimate meaning are closed off to language and reason, reason can be at once ascendent and descendent because the two truths themselves are a "manifesting of truth." In fact, the workings of rational thinking consist in a return from the world of ultimate meaning to worldly, conventional truth. It is only when reason is unable to take a single step in ascent and loses its way that descent makes it truly possible to be logical and reasonable.

Therefore the term "truth" in the phrase "overthrowing falsehood and manifesting truth," which is the banner of the San-lun school, cannot be understood to refer only to ultimate meaning and emptiness. If "truth" referred only to that which is ultimately meaningful as ineffable and inconceivable, except for the overthrowing of falsehood, there would be no manifestation of truth. There remains only overthrowing and refutation. In fact, "truth" must be turned toward the worldly and conventional. The manifestation of truth is the establishment of worldly convention whereby ultimate meaning is manifest within language. The "silent" Śākyamuni came to preach doctrine through an understanding of the two truths. Although he taught "84,000 doctrines," it is said that "he never spoke a single word."

Truth is not simply emptiness, but must be validated within the being of emptiness, that is, within dependent co-arising. What is more, unless understood as dependent co-arising, truth cannot be validated at all. If all phenomena simply returned to emptiness and became one with silence, like rivers emptying into the ocean, there would only be a movement of ascent without any subsequent reengagement in the world. All the rich color of dependently co-arising phenomena would

fade into an undifferentiated and unidentifiable whiteness. If truth in "the manifestation of truth as overthrowing falsehood" were simply emptiness, there would be no manifestation of truth apart from overthrowing falsehood. One could no longer say "the flowers are red," let alone speak of the 84,000 teachings. Truth is to be found not only in attention to a negative emptiness, but must also be sought in an affirmative dependent co-arising. There is no question here of finally falling back on discourse, as if, after unsuccessfully having tried all kinds of means to manifest emptiness, one had to "force it into words." The use of words is what constitutes the Buddha teaching, the Buddha's verbal manifestation of truth. It is not a forcing of something into language, but a spontaneous outflow of awakening. Ultimate meaning is mediated by conventional truth. This is why emptiness is identical with dependent co-arising. Claims that justify the two truths on the grounds that one must "base oneself on the dispositions of sentient beings," render truth univocally conventional precisely because it is so grounded. Furthermore, if basing oneself on dispositions becomes a forcible reliance on words, then there can be no "lion's roar" of awakening reverberating down through the world. One is left only with an ascendent, world-denying illumination. The two truths mean that the truth, as ultimate meaning, is also worldly and conventional. There is no manifestation of ultimate meaning apart from the manifestation of the truth of conventional language, just as there can be no emptiness apart from dependent co-arising.

While the San-lun tradition regarded the two truths as conducive teachings, increasingly some of its members came to hold that the Indian thinkers Bhāvaviveka and Jñānaprabha taught the two truths as a conducive principle. In his *Commentary on the Treatise on the Middle*, Chi-tsang argued that the two truths referred neither to content nor to expression, but that, if used sensibly and at an appropriate time, they might freely function both as conducive teaching and as conducive principle. But when he treats "the two truths elucidated by the Tathāgata" (T. 42, p. 29a), he regards them as representing objects of illumination, thus, losing any reference to the identity between the birth-death cycle and cessation. The two truths are not a mere theoretical exercise, but something to be known, practiced, and existentially realized as comprising the entirety of doctrine, practice, and attainment. Even when taken to refer to language and logic, they embody not only insight into transcendence and quietude, but also insight into and reengagement with the everyday world of language and reason.

Chapter 3

The Conventional World of Being

Being-to-its-Limit and Being-as-Such: A Mahāyāna Understanding of Being

Worldly convention and ultimate meaning each encompass the entire world. This implies that the world is not double layered, as if it were composed of one worldly conventional layer and another ultimately meaningful layer. Once one has attained awakening, the whole of the world affirmed as conventional is identified with the world of ultimate meaning. In its being-in-the-world, however, worldly convention contrasts with ultimate meaning.

Fairly early in the development of Buddhist doctrine, a similar contrast was drawn between being-to-its-limit and being-as-such, both of which describe the same world in its entirety. "Being-to-its-limit" (*yāvadbhāvikatā*) parallels what we have been speaking of as worldly convention, while "being-as-such" (*yathāvadbhāvikatā*) corresponds to ultimate meaning.

Being-to-its-limit denotes the all-inclusive totality of all beings; it applies to everything temporal, spatial, calculable, or measurable. It has affinities with such terms as the unlimited, the inexhaustible, and the immeasurable. Bodhisattva practice is not simply a matter of arriving at a final truth that marks the end of the Buddha path, since it cannot dispense with an all-inclusive, universal understanding (*sarvajñatva*) that surveys all the areas of worldly, conventional understanding. Throughout the history of Buddhism, there have been persons who set their hearts on a model of holiness (*arhat*) in which cessation amounts to reducing the body to ashes and obliterating all consciousness. In the bodhisattva career, one must go beyond such sanctity to immerse oneself once again in the actual world of everyday experience. The wisdom of a bodhisattva is not merely an inner realization. The "five learnings" to be cultivated include not only inner meditation, but also

such secular studies as grammar, the arts, mathematics, medicine, and logic. Buddhist learning is not limited to religious doctrine, but stresses the need to engage oneself in science and the arts. The wisdom necessary for bodhisattva practice extends across a broad, unlimited horizon to the limit of being. Concrete and practical knowledge is required of the bodhisattva, a wide-ranging wisdom which, while exhausting being-to-its-limit, is at the same time secular and conventional.

Being-as-such is suchness and parallels the wisdom of ultimate meaning. In contrast to the quantatively unlimited and broad purview of being-to-its-limit, this wisdom is a qualitative understanding of the world just as it is. Its insight into truth plunges perpendicularly into the original nature of all things in a direct and unmediated manner. Thus, while conventional being-to-its-limit denotes the broad expanse (*udāra*) of wisdom and insight, ultimately meaningful being-as-such points to their depths (*gambhīra*). Worldly convention is described in the Buddhist texts as blunt (*audārika*), while ultimate meaning is spoken of as sharp and incisive (*sūkṣma*).

The terms being-to-its-limit and being-as-such are frequently found in the writings of the Yogācāra school, but their correspondence with the two truths of worldly convention and ultimate meaning is not explicitly stated in so many words in the Chinese Buddhist texts. The later Tibetan Lamaist tradition does relate them directly to the two truths, using being-to-its-limit (*ji-snyed-pa*) and being-as-such (*ji-lta-ba*) in places where one would expect to find worldly convention and ultimate meaning. This Lamaist tradition is squarely based on Mādhyamika thought and gives central importance to Nāgarjuna's theme of the two truths. One might think that the Lamaist use of these terms with their strong Yogācāra flavor indicates a tendency to synthesize Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, but this tendency can be seen already in much earlier Indian texts such as *The Ornament of Clear Understandings.*

Russian scholars well-versed in the Lamaist tradition have often pointed out that being-to-its-limit and being-as-such directly correspond to worldly convention and ultimate meaning.[1] The Chinese equivalents for the Tibetan terms *ji-snyed-pa* (being-to-its-limit) and *ji-lta-ba* (being-as-such) are *chin-so-yu* (尽所有) and *ju-so-yu* (如所有). These Chinese terms first appear in the translation of the foundational Yogācāra *Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning*, and are repeated in the translations of *The Treatise on Stages of Yogic Practice* and in *The Commentary on the Summary of the Great Vehicle.*

The first instance in *The Explication of Underlying Meaning* occurs in the chapter "On the Analysis of Centering," where being-to-its-limit and being-as-such respectively refer to the first and second of the ten

items of a bodhisattva's understanding.[2] But they are not directly identified there as synonymous with worldly convention and ultimate meaning. This scripture teaches that being-to-its-limit refers to "all the various aspects of all defiled and purified things as far as they extend." This includes all "the aggregates, realms, and bases" that make up the entirety of the empirical world. Being-as-such refers to "universal suchness in all defiled and purified things." The use of these terms in *The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning* (apparently their first appearance), especially in the dialogue with Maitreya in the Section "On the Analysis of Centering" (*yoga*), suggests their early connection with the yogic (centering) practices of the bodhisattva path.

The earliest occurence of these terms in the śāstra literature is found in "The Bodhisattva Stages" of *The Treatise on the Stages of Yogic Practice.* The introduction to the chapter on "The Meaning of Reality" (chüan 36) states:

> The meaning of reality is summarized as twofold. The first is the reality of all things in their being-as-such. The second is the entirety of all things in their being-to-its-limit. It is this reality and this entirety that we describe as the meaning of reality (T. 30, p. 486b).

In the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of this text, being-as-such is *yathāvadbhāvikatā* and *ji-lta-ba*, while being-to-its-limit is *yāvadbhāvikatā* and *ji-snyed-pa.* In the "Wisdom" chapter (chüan 43) of the same text the term *sūkṣma* (sharp) is applied to insight whose content is being-as-such, and the term *nipuṇa* (adroit) to insight whose content is being-to-its-limit (T. 30, p. 529a), again suggesting that they are parallel to the two truths. In the section on "The Summations of Judgments" (chüan 74), bodhisattva wisdom is described as penetrating to being-as-such, and understanding as apprehending being-to-its-limit (T. 30, p. 709a).

These sources make it clear that being-to-its-limit describes worldly convention in that it is depicted as universal and all-inclusive wisdom, while being-as-such describes ultimate meaning in that it is described as reality, as sharp and incisive, although the terms worldly convention and ultimate meaning themselves do not actually appear in any of these passages.

Vasubandhu used the terms, "being-to-its-limit" and "being-as-such" in the invocational stanza of *The Commentary on the Summary of the Great Vehicle.* In his Chinese translation of this text, Hsüan-tsang at first gives the usual rendering of *chin-ch'i-so-yu* (尽其所有; being-to-its-limit) and *ju-so-yu* (如所有; being-as-such), but then later substitutes the terms *chen-su li* (真俗理), that is, ultimate and

conventional truth, thus connecting them directly with the two truths. Paramārtha's Chinese translation of the same passage gives *ju-li* (如理), "as in truth," and *ju-liang* (如量), "as in extent." P'u-chi, reflecting Hsüan Tsang's translation, interprets Paramārtha's rendering to mean that the "phrases as in truth and as in extent indicate the two wisdoms of ultimate meaning and worldly convention." Thus, the same pairing appears in the terms *ju-li-hsiu* (如理修), "cultivation in truth," and *ju-liang-chih* (如量智), "wisdom in extent," found in Vasubandhu's *Treatise on Buddha Nature* (again in Paramārtha's translation). Here too cultivation evidently indicates ultimate meaning, while wisdom signifies worldly convention.

In these texts, being-to-its-limit refers to the aggregates, bases, and realms which "extend to the limit of the birth-death cycle" (*yāvat saṃsāraṃ, yāval lokagataṃ*). The bodhisattva commitment consists in locating oneself within these transmigratory limits of sentient beings, in order to bear witness patiently to the wisdom of awakening, postponing entrance into cessation as long as there are still unawakened beings. This is the bodhisattva practice of "maturing sentient beings" and implies involvement in the world. Prerequisite for this practice is an understanding of the reality of suchness (*yathābhūta-jñāna, yathābhūta-avabodha, yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti*) based on insight into being-as-such. In virtue of understanding the truth of suchness through the fundamental wisdom of awakening to ultimate meaning, a "subsequently attained wisdom" is brought into play in order to enunciate doctrine. Thus, the terms limit (*yāvat*) and such (*yathā*) contrast worldly and conventional bodhisattva practice with direct realization, transcending space and time, thereby implying that the terms being-to-its-limit and being-as-such do indeed parallel worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Such descriptions seem to be quite early, despite the fact that the free and frequent use of the terms as synonyms is found only later, when the center of Buddhism moved to Tibet.

The Two Truths as Differentiations of Wisdom: Two Ways of Understanding, Not Two Levels of Being

The insight that the being-as-such of the world in its totality is ultimate meaning, and that the being-to-its-limit of the world in its totality is worldly convention, reflects the structure of wisdom. This does not mean that ultimate meaning and worldly convention actually

exist as realities in the realm of being. This is why each is able to encompass the one, all-inclusive world in its entirety. Commenting on the twenty-third stanza of the sixth chapter of his *Introduction to the Middle* Candrakīrti states clearly:

> The essence of differentiation in beings comes about from insight into truth and human artifice. The content of insight into truth is reality, i.e., ultimate meaning. The content of insight into human artifice is the truth of worldly convention (Stanza 23).
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> ....
>
> All Buddha Bhagavats who unerringly understand the two truths teach that in all things—whether internal, such as character dispositions (*saṃskāra*), or external, such as sprouts (*aṅkura*)—there are two essences: worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Ultimate meaning is a realization of essence as the content of the eminent wisdom that attains to insight into reality as it presents itself. But this essence (*ātmabhāva*) is not a fully self-enclosing essence (*ātma-svarūpa-siddha*), such that worldly convention might cling to things as if they were essential beings as a result of the illusions of common worldlings whose wisdom eye is blinded by cataracts of primal ignorance. Since it does not exist, such a fully enclosed essence is only an object of foolish understanding. The two truths each include all beings (de la Vallée Poussin ed., pp. 102-103).

This passage presents Candrakīrti's basic attitude on the two truths and suggests the depth of his insight. Although the nuances of the passage remain unclear, its overall import is that the differentiation of the same world into the two realms of worldly convention and ultimate meaning does not imply two originally separate worlds. The differentiation of realms derives rather from understanding.

But here understanding, as the dependent co-arising of conscious construction-only, does not, of course, refer only to the principle of birth-death continuity. The Yogācāra notion of conscious construction employs an idea of the development of the container mind, thinking, sense consciousness only to explain the genesis of the discriminative understanding of blind worldlings as unreal imagining. The content of holy, awakened wisdom surpasses illusion and is regarded as ultimate meaning. The content of this holy wisdom is clearly 'being,' but, as the reference from Candrakīrti cited earlier notes, not in the sense of "fully self-enclosing essences."

Nāgarjuna's famous eighth stanza on the two truths in the chapter "On the Four Truths" of his *Stanzas on the Middle* (24.8) was a favorite among the commentators. We will first give the verse and Piṅgala's

commentary in the Chinese translation of this text:

> The truth of worldly convention means that, even though all beings are empty, illusions still arise because of the error of the world. In the world this [error] is considered to be truth and reality. Because the sages truly understand unerringly, they know that all doctrinal content is entirely empty and does not arise. To the wise this is the truth of ultimate meaning and they describe it as reality (T. 30, p. 32c).

The Tibetan translation of *The Fearless Commentary* offers a somewhat different interpretation, seemingly bringing conventional truth more within the content of dependent co-arising. It explains the truth of worldly convention as follows:

> [Worldly convention signifies] that since all beings are empty, one gains insight into the arising and passing away of all things through unerring and infallible realization in the world.

Here worldly convention is not empty or provisional, but "arising and passing away," that is, conditioned by change and co-arising dependently. The phrase "unerring and infallible" stands in opposition to Piṅgala's "error in the world" and is probably meant to emphasize the reason why conventional truth is termed truth, a topic we will discuss later.

Thus, the truth of worldly convention is seen here as an unconfused, lucid consciousness extending throughout the world, while ordinary worldly and conventional understanding is errant and clouded over by primal ignorance. This is stated explicitly by Candrakīrti and indicated by Piṅgala in describing the truth of ultimate meaning in contrast to worldly convention:

> Having attained unmistaken, awakened wisdom, the wise regard all doctrinal content as non-arising (T. 30, p. 32c).

In contrast to "the arising of falsifiable doctrine" or "the arising and passing away" of worldly convention, ultimate meaning appears here as "not arising, not passing away, empty and unerring."

All the commentaries teach that ultimate meaning moves in a realm of holy wisdom and deep insight into reality, while worldly convention moves in a realm of the falsifiable understanding of common worldlings. From the perspective of wisdom, ultimate meaning is entirely real while worldly convention is falsifiable.

This raises a problem: If the understanding of worldly convention is described as wisdom, how can it be characterized as falsifiable and

contrived? And if the latter, how can it be "truth?" How can it build a world of discourse? How can it ever be validated within worldly discourse? Does not the unity of truth in the single world negate the validity of two realms of truth? Not only Mādhyamika thinkers like Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka, but also such Yogācāra thinkers as Sthiramati and Dharmapāla, frequently grappled with these questions.

The Etymology and Meaning of "Worldly Convention": The Difference a Single Letter Can Make

The Chinese term for ultimate meaning *sheng-i* (勝義) is a literal translation of the Sanskrit term *paramārtha*, where *parama* (ultimate) corresponds to *sheng* (勝) and *artha* (meaning) to *i* (義). In contrast the Chinese term for worldly convention *shih-su* (世俗) is an interpretative, not a literal, translation. The failure of the Chinese to present a literal translation and the many problems this entails may be due to the fact that the Sanskrit texts have two spellings for worldly convention, *saṃvṛti* and *saṃvṛtti*. *Saṃvṛti* derives from the root *vṛ*, "to cover, hide, obstruct," thus suggesting that *saṃvṛti-satya* is covered or hidden truth (*satya*). But *saṃvṛtti* derives from the root *vṛt*, "to exist, arise, come about, activate," thus suggesting that *saṃvṛtti-satya* is truth that comes about within the world. The difference between the two, consisting only in a single letter, could be merely the result of an error in copying, or a variant peculiar to given manuscripts (we have the example of the term *sattva* [sentient being] often being reduced to *satva* in some manuscripts, without implying any change in meaning).

But here the difference is more significant and seems to have occasioned some perplexity to the Chinese translators who, in rendering it as "worldly convention," reflect neither Sanskrit etymology. Furthermore, the Indian pandits with their feel for words would hardly have overlooked the presence or absence of a letter that changes the root meaning of a term. As conscious as they were of root meanings, the Indians could scarcely have intended the Chinese meaning of "worldly convention." Consequently, we cannot make use of the Chinese term in attempting to grasp the meaning intended by the Sanskrit. How then did the Chinese arrive at this translation?

In de la Vallée Poussin's revised edition of Candrakīrti's *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way* the spelling *saṃvṛti* is used throughout, both in Nāgarjuna's stanzas and in Candrakīrti's commentary. Candra-

kīrti gives three etymologies for the term *saṃvṛti.* First, "*saṃvṛti* means a pervasive occlusion" (*samantād varaṇaṃ saṃvṛtiḥ*). In this sense, *saṃvṛti* is nothing more than a universal clouding over and occlusion of truth. This is the most strictly etymological reading, defining *saṃvṛti* from its underlying elements of *sam* and *varaṇaṃ.* It also has clear doctrinal implications, since the consistent Mādhyamika understanding of *saṃvṛti* in all the literature as far back as Candrakīrti's *Introduction to the Middle* is that its basic meaning is "a universal occlusion," the clouding over of primal ignorance, basic misunderstanding (*ajñāna*) without any insight into reality. Even when described as understanding, it is incapable of freeing one from primal ignorance and always arises together with it. In the face of ultimately meaningful truth, such basic misunderstanding and primal ignorance always remain, in the final analysis, falsifiable. As *vṛ* implies, *saṃvṛti* shields and hides true reality behind the conventions of common worldlings. Candrakīrti's "pervasive occlusion" denotes an obstacle precisely to true understanding.

Since this clouded and occluded understanding is enmeshed in the dependent co-arising birth-death cycle, it cannot be wisdom's insight into the emptiness of all things. Accordingly, Candrakīrti's second etymology of *saṃvṛti* has the term mean "mutually dependent being" (*paraspara-saṃbhavana, paraspara-samāśraya*). The notion of mutual dependency (*paraspara-apekṣā*), generally used to define dependent co-arising, is here applied to *saṃvṛti.* In contrast to what is empty, non-existent, and undifferentiated, the worldly and conventional always exists in mutual dependence within a world of manifold being. This multiplicity and differentiation is nothing other than the discrimination of self from others, of subject from object, whence "names" are engendered and languages developed.

It follows that the third etymology of *saṃvṛti* is "symbolic and social discourse" (*saṃketo lokavyavahāraḥ*). Symbolic (*saṃketa*) here refers to the expression of worldly conventions through conceptual and verbal signs. It is because of these conventional symbols that one produces "descriptions of such things as subjects and objects, the knower and the known." Social discourse (*vyavahāra*) refers to the uses of language according to the dictates of social custom. It is synonymous with descriptive speech and discourse.

Thus, *saṃvṛti* is described in a threefold etymology as "basic misunderstanding, mutual dependency, and symbolic discourse." The most fundamental of these is basic misunderstanding, the clouding and occluding of primal ignorance. Mutual dependent arising and discriminative judgmental discourse are elemental forms of worldly convention derived from basic misunderstanding.

The Yogācāra thinkers also treated the truth of worldly convention frequently. *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* also distinguishes three elements in worldly convention, but its interpretation is rather different from that of Candrakīrti. Following Sthiramati's *Commentary* on this text,[3] the basic character of worldly convention is described as language, the third of Candrakīrti's points. Language is then differentiated into common sense speech, the basic functioning of understanding, and the manifestation of truth. Let us consider each of them briefly.

First, the language of worldly convention is common sense speech (*prajñapti*). In the phrase of Paramārtha's Chinese translation, it is "the setting up of names." This means thinking in names, speaking on the basis of that thinking, and then positing (*vyavasthāna*) the being of things. In Yogācāra thought, this development issues in worldly convention as the pattern of clinging to the imagined.

Second, language is "the functioning of understanding" (*pratipatti*), expressed by Paramārtha as "the functioning of apprehension." Worldly convention is understood here as the understanding and apprehension of beings that have been set up in language, the imaginative discrimination (*vikālpa*) of that which is imagined. The functioning of understanding refers to the execution of discriminative knowing. In Yogācāra terms, this discrimination is worldly convention as the other-dependent pattern of conscious understanding, that is, the actual operation of understanding in which the container consciousness and the active consciousnesses of thinking and perception arise in synergy.

Third, language is manifestation (*udbhāvanā*), by which is meant a bringing-into-being through uncovering and making manifest. At this level language signals the appearance (*saṃdarśana*) in words of the full perfection of ineffable emptiness. Inasmuch as it frames the ineffable in words, it is worldly convention; at the same time and inasmuch as it is "suchness as dependent on words," it is truth. Language here is the truth of worldly convention manifest in its full perfection.

The second of these three senses of worldly convention most accurately conveys its worldly character, namely, as the actual, conventional functioning of understanding. As conscious apprehension, discrimination is immediately verbalized; as it arises in synergy with other-dependent imagining, it is dependently co-arising worldly convention. The setting up of names and manifesting of truth do not of themselves constitute worldly convention, but are constituted within worldly convention as different modes of its operation (*avasara*). In the truth of worldly convention, the world of everyday conscious discrimination and judgment holds the central position, from which the common sense setting

up of names through imagination and the manifestation of full perfection issue, the former in a downward direction and the latter upward.

The Vijñaptimātra explanation of worldly convention differs considerably from the explanation given by Candrakīrti, whose notions of "basic misunderstanding" and "clouding and occluding" are absent here. The standard against which all three meanings are examined is rather dependently co-arising language. In his third point Candrakīrti does identify worldly convention as language, a theme common to both Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. The glaring omission of any reference to "basic misunderstanding" or "clouding and occluding" in the Vijñaptimātra treatment does not mean, however, that the Yogācārins rejected these ideas. The Yogācāra thinkers had no doubt that worldly convention was entangled in ignorance, as is amply shown in Dharmapāla's explanation of the truth of worldly convention. But as Yogācārins, they did not present the two truths as their basic approach to truth. Instead they interpreted truth through the three patterns of consciousness (and its negative form of the three non-patterns). They reinterpreted the theme of the two truths in accord with the structure and design of the three patterns. It was obvious to them that worldly convention implies basic misunderstanding and primal ignorance. In the introduction of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, discrimination and apprehension are described as the world of primal ignorance opposing emptiness as an other-dependent, unreal imagining (*abhūta-parikalpa*). But rather than concentrate on this character of worldly convention as primal misunderstanding and falsifiable opinion, they focused on the explanation of the three patterns of consciousness, within which they located worldly convention.

Worldly convention is most accurately described, then, as the development of language (*vyavahāra*). Its three meanings of common sense naming, the basic functioning of understanding, and manifesting are all connected with the constitution of language and thus clearly exhibit the sense of "arising." Since the Yogācāra thinkers regarded language as the locus of all worldly convention, they would appear to have thought of worldly convention as deriving from a Sanskrit spelling of *saṃvṛtti*, deriving from the root, *vṛt*, to arise.

The Meaning of Worldly Convention in the Chinese Translations: How They Reflect Indian Commentaries

Let us now consider the interpretation that Hsüan-tsang spread

throughout China, which was based on his exegesis of the Chinese characters *shih-su* (世俗). In the second chapter "On the Two Truths" of his *Forest of Luxuriant Doctrinal Meanings*, Hsüan-tsang's disciple Ch'i (632-682) presents the orthodox opinion of Dharmapāla, describing the truth of worldly convention as "truth both hidden and manifest." Ch'i then offers the following interpretation of the terms "worldly" and "convention":

> Worldly signifies that which is hidden and clouded over, that which can be destroyed. Convention signifies manifesting, that which follows social custom (T. 71, p. 756a).

The first half of chapter one of Ch'i's *Commentary on Conscious Construction Only* offers an almost identical interpretation, except that the phrase "hidden and clouded over" becomes "clouded and occluded" (T. 43, p. 237c). This explanation assigns two distinct meanings to the Chinese characters *shih-su* (世俗), here translated as "worldly" and "convention." It is difficult to ascertain today the precise etymologies of these Chinese words, but the original Sanskrit was certainly a single term, *saṃvṛt(t)i*, not a compound. In translating a single Sanskrit word the Chinese often rendered it as a compound of two glyphs, and then went on to trace the etymology of each of the Chinese characters in total disregard of the original Sanskrit. They seem to have regarded the Chinese text as original, and devoted themselves to an exegesis of that Chinese text. Such a procedure is, of course, neither linguistically justifiable nor is it peculiar to Buddhism. But in the case of their interpretation of the terms "worldly" and "convention," they seem, at least in part, to have respected the meaning of the original Sanskrit.

In Chi's interpretation of the term "worldly," the phrases "hidden and clouded over" or "clouded and occluded" are certainly consistent with the Mādhyamika interpretation of *saṃvṛti* as "clouding and occluding," according to which worldly convention is a constant hiding and clouding over of reality, an occlusion of insight into reality. If Ch'i is indeed reflecting this Mādhyamika idea, he seems to have taken the word worldly as the equivalent of *saṃ-vṛ*. The later translator I-ching directly calls the truth of worldly convention a "clouded, conventional truth" or simply "clouded truth," and states that the old translation for the truth of worldly convention was "inadequate." (See chapter four of his *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago*.) Here again, worldly convention is understood in terms of the root *vṛ*, to cover over and hide.

Ch'i further defines worldly as "that which can be destroyed."

If the basic meaning of worldly is to cloud over and obstruct, what can it mean to destroy it? The phrase is difficult to interpret if it involves a direct link in meaning between its two parts. "That which can be destroyed" seems to refer rather to the transient world that will finally be destroyed and nullified. Here Ch'i's interpretation of the term "world" no longer follows the original Sanskrit term for worldly convention, *saṃvṛti.* Instead he focuses on the Sanskrit term, *loka,* the equivalent of the Chinese term *shih-chien* (世間), world. From a root word meaning "to see, know, illumine," *loka* came to acquire the sense of "destruction, collapse"[4] (witness the Tibetan translation of *loka* as *'jig-rten,* the place of destruction). Furthermore, the Chinese translations report that world also means "passing and flowing away," which is probably related to the etymology of terms like *adhvan,* time—translated as the three worlds of past, present, and future—or to the denotation of terms like as *saṃsāra,* the birth-death cycle. In short, the Chinese gave the term world a number of meanings that are quite close to that of "destruction," and Ch'i's second meaning of world as "that which can be destroyed" reflects these meanings rather than any of the etymologies of *saṃvṛti(t)i.*

Ch'i's first meaning for the term "convention" is "manifesting," which parallels Sthiramati's idea of manifesting (*udbhāvanā*) in his *Commentary on the Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes.* It is not absolutely certain that the Chinese term convention *su* (俗) did not connote manifesting, but most probably Ch'i's interpretation is derived from the Sanskrit spelling of *saṃvṛtti.* The myriad things of this world, in all their forms and meanings—the achievements of culture as well as the mountains and rivers, plants, and trees—pass before our eyes one moment, and the next moment they are gone. But, their phenomenal appearance is itself an actual manifestation of truth, as Sthiramati has shown.

Ch'i next describes this manifestation as "that which follows worldly currents." By "following" is meant that something lofty follows upon and reveals itself within the baser currents of meaning in the world. The meaning of the Chinese term used for convention *sui-shih-liu* (隨世流) seems to be closest to this "following worldly currents," which itself suggests a "spreading in the wake of social custom" and thus, a communication through worldly discourse (*vyavahāra*). Convention here means that the real is manifested in words currently in use in the world, and not primarily "lowly and vulgar" that is its occasional secondary and derivative meaning.

Ch'i's explanation of convention as an "arising" and a "coming to be" of truth in dependently co-arising language, is in full agreement

with Sthiramati. We may therefore suppose that the original term Ch'i has in mind for worldly convention seems to have been *saṃvṛtti*, from the root *vṛt*, to arise or come to be.[5]

In the Dharmapāla lineage of Yogācāra introduced to China by Hsüan-tsang, the orthodox interpretation of the truth of worldly convention is that it is "truth both hidden and manifest." In combining these opposite ideas, this interpretation apparently makes use of both Sanskrit spellings and attempts to synthesize worldly convention in the Chinese compound *yin-hsien* (隱顯). Worldly convention is hidden (*vṛ*) inasmuch it is a "clouding over" and "occluding" of truth through basic misunderstanding and primal ignorance. Worldly convention remains within the birth-death cycle of dependent co-arising and is not frozen in an ultimately meaningful splendor. Its appearance and manifestation (*vṛt*) arise in the birth-death cycle in the mutual dependency between what is done and the act of doing. But even though "manifestation" does manifest perfected suchness, that perfected suchness is not known just as it is. It is a process of verbal manifestation, a bringing of doctrine to speech, not full perfection itself. It is enunciated suchness, not ineffable suchness. In this sense, it must be worldly and conventional because it moves within the sphere of language.

Worldly convention has therefore the senses of hidden and manifest, the themes of social custom and language complementing these meanings in the background. This doctrine is not, however, limited to Dharmapāla's lineage of Yogācāra. It is also clearly presented in Candrakīrti's teaching on the three meanings of "error, mutual dependency, and language." That is to say, the notion of worldly convention as both clouded occlusion and manifestation implies the sequential continuity of ascent and descent, of transcending the world and reengaging in the world.

The Ascendent Exigency Within Worldly Convention: The Spontaneity and Inefficacy of the Desire for Ultimate Meaning

The world of conventional co-arising—the unawakened profane world in which our transmigration through life and death as such is seen to be a dependent co-arising—is, of course, a fallen existence. Understanding does not grasp the truth; and the good, even if actualized, is never entirely good. We are always overshadowed by primal ignorance and blocked from truth. Even though I may believe my actions to be

good, in their final outcome they often turn out to be otherwise, and I am constantly made to repent the unanticipated evil results of my actions. Even if I desire happiness for all people, I cannot but commit sins that result in unhappiness. Our wisdom is too small to cover the whole world. We are incapable of knowing in advance what effects our actions will have or of predicting our own future. But even within this our fallen existence an aspiration toward what is above rises up spontaneously. All striving for understanding, goodness, and beauty are ascendent in their basic thrust, but as long as one is unaware of the fallenness of the world, one scarcely becomes aware of any fall or any exigency for ascent. All thirst for truth, beauty, and goodness is in itself ascendent, even when one is unaware and unconscious of anything beyond the world. The world is simultaneously enmeshed in unconscious ignorance and ascendent in its spontaneous exigency for truth and goodness. Even the most vile actions like theft and murder are performed in the hope of some betterment. If even such actions as these aim at improving present conditions, how much more the conscious quest for truth, goodness, and beauty. Yet one must penetrate beyond even this awareness, for to focus single-mindedly on what is above is often nothing more than an unbounded passion that cannot be ascendent in the true sense of the term. Any true, conscious movement toward ascent must be grounded on a recognition of our descent into a fallen condition. It often happens that in scholarship, in the arts, and in other fields there may be a conscious thrust for what is higher but at the same time a complete absence of any awareness of our fallen condition. It is only in recognition of our ignorance that we are capable of understanding truth, only through an awareness of our ugliness and sin that we ascend to beauty and goodness. The narrow pursuit of knowledge only issues in quantities of information that flit by in review, like sparrows hopping from branch to branch. But any quantity of knowledge, no matter how great, is not ascendent awareness, which requires consciousness of the fall. Even in the deliberate pursuit of wisdom, ascent begins with a devaluation and negation of wisdom. Knowledge becomes understanding only through a recognition that knowing is not knowing. Awareness becomes ascendent only when one understands that the dependently co-arisen world as such is without essence and empty, lacking all truth and reality.

Ultimate meaning becomes present precisely in the realization of the non-reality of reality, the non-goodness of goodness, the non-beauty of beauty, that is, when one comes to live in some small degree through dying to the self. In other words, the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, whether consciously undertaken or not, must itself become

religious and spiritual. It must lead one into the numinous, that is, into the synthesis of truth, goodness, and beauty, for any religious factor reigning over and above truth, goodness, and beauty is meaningless. The identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness implies the denial of any religious, numinous, spiritual kingdom apart from the world of understanding, virtue, and beauty. The ascendent exigency driving us toward understanding and goodness reaches all the way to the realm of ultimate meaning, and for that reason transcends the world. In negating its own content and condescending to the lowest state of ignorance, wisdom is thrown back into the "ultimate meaning" of understanding. When we say that wisdom, originally unawakened and incapable of ever attaining awareness, now opens up on the realm of ultimate meaning and transcends the world, we do not mean that wisdom can naturally find its way to ultimate meaning because of its ascending thrust. The plunge into ultimate meaning is measured by the degree of its involvement in worldly convention. The leap to ultimate meaning does not carry us beyond the lowest state of our fallen condition, wherein knowing negates its own content and beauty rejects its own attainments of beauty. This is the true leap over unlimited, insuperable fragmentation and alienation.

How does such a leap become possible? One cannot expect that the mere recognition of the presence of primal ignorance will itself open up an ascending path. Ignorance, after all, is ignorance and defiled worldlings, defiled worldlings. An understanding that ignorance is ignorance comes about only as the fruit of discernment (*vidyā*). The diffusive light of discernment illumines a path to ascent. But light does not burst up from within primal ignorance itself. It must be introduced from elsewhere.

The self-awareness of the conventional world of dependently co-arising transmigration must depend on an other-awareness issuing from the realm of emptiness and ultimate meaning. Such a dependent co-arising is guided from beyond dependent co-arising and depends on an awakening to what is other. But this dependence on awakening to what is other remains within the compass of dependent co-arising, insofar as it is dependent on what is other. Thus, that on which it is dependent lies beyond the pale of dependent co-arising, and at the same time the character of dependent co-arising remains a dependence on that which is other. In this sense, it is a dependence encompassed within dependent co-arising. It is in the nature of dependent co-arising to draw to itself what lies beyond it. In a parallel manner, worldly convention is not only the clouded occlusion of primal ignorance but also is discourse occuring within the context of ignorance and manifesting (*udbhāvanā*)

truth. Of itself verbal discourse never captures truth and is always falsifiable. At the same time, it is a manifestation through worldly convention of ultimate meaning, in the same way that truth, goodness, and beauty have an ascendent exigency and lead to the transcendent. Grounded in our fallen world of dependent co-arising, truth and reality are always and forever enunciated ideas.

It should not be forgotten in all of this that dependent co-arising constitutes a fallen world opposed to emptiness and ultimate truth. Emptiness does not produce dependent co-arising. Indeed, emptiness does not act at all. If it had a subjective dynamism of its own, its activity would have to be totally co-arisen in dependency, just like any other dynamic movement of being. Therefore, the content of the dependently co-arisen world can only be produced by dependent co-arising. Likewise, the manifestation of emptiness as such signifies ultimate meaning, but there could be no such manifestation without a foundation in conventional dependent co-arising. The dependently co-arising manifestation of truth—the advent of the Buddha and his spoken word as the dependent co-arising of awakening—comes from beyond, even when viewed from the within of the dependently co-arising, conventional, fallen world. For the buddhas and bodhisattvas, there must be a descent from awakening to sentient beings, from emptiness to dependently co-arising being. This constitutes an "other-awareness" for people in the world insofar as it brings them to a self-awareness of the light.

Worldly convention then is not merely the birth-death cycle, but also exhibits a drive to ascend. It is not simply the hidden, clouded occlusion of primal ignorance, but also a manifesting of truth. The fact that this manifestation is an ascendent, transcendent movement on the part of sentient beings means of course that it is not accomplished by sentient beings themselves, but represents the descendent reengagement in the world of buddhas and bodhisattvas. That ascent is at the same time descent, that the transcendent movement of sentient beings can be described as an involvement of the Buddha from beyond, is due to the fact that worldly convention, as primal ignorance, is occluded by ignorance. If worldly convention were not so occluded but simply a dependent co-arising insight into birth and death, coming and going, it could not establish such an identity of ascent and descent. Of itself, dependent co-arising is simply the mediating ground for both the birth-death cycle and cessation in other-dependence. It is on this ground that time and space arise and that the perfected cessation that transcends time and space is realized. For sentient beings none of this constitutes transcendence or reengagement in the world; it provides no avenue for any understanding of the meaning of ascent and descent. The significance

of ascent and descent lies rather in a bipolar potentiality within other-dependent arising itself: to become discrimination and imagining, and to reach full perfection by the cessation of that activity. In imagining, worldly convention becomes adventitiously clouded over and occluded by primal ignorance and constitutes the fallen existence of the world. Therefore, it is manifest as an ascendent orientation, and at the same time as the descent of a buddha. To revert to our earlier terminology, just as the clouding occlusion of primal ignorance is extraneous and adventitious to the other-dependent mind, so the manifestation of truth is a fortuitous occurrence, sudden and unexpected.

In Yogācāra thought, the discrimination and imagination of other-dependent consciousness (the birth-death cycle of the developments of consciousness into conscious constructs) are employed as a skillful means to enter the unmarked *ju wu-hsiang* as a movement from lower to higher through a conventional and worldly discourse. Here "skill-ful means" is not simply a method employed by sentient beings to ascend to the unmarked; it must be a skillful means employed by the Buddha to reengage himself with the world. Insight into the real world as conscious construction-only is insight into the evolution of defiled consciousness. It is impossible to enter any final imageless state so long as one relies on the skillful methods of sentient beings and not those of Buddha. In order to evolve truly skillful means, one has to understand that reengagement in the world from beyond occurs in a context of the other-dependence of both imagining and the full perfection of freedom from imagining. It is this other-dependent pattern that is clouded over and occluded by primal ignorance. Inasmuch as other-dependence is not confined to its own definition but entails a provisional descent into imaginings that are worldly, evil, ugly, and mean, it becomes clear that full perfection is other-dependent, an enunciation of doctrine by the Dharma body of Buddha. True entry into the realm of the image-less does not consist simply in the recognition of the development of defiled consciousness whereby one understands that "the three worlds are conscious constructs only," even if that be regarded as a skillful means of sentient beings. The development of consciousness into the pattern of clingling to the imagined implies that other-dependent consciousness is both an imagining and an other-dependent, co-arising full perfection. Imagining is the clouding over and occlusion of worldly convention. Although hidden, worldly convention reveals; although clouded and occluded, it makes manifest.

Chapter 4

The Truth of Worldly Convention

Occluding Worldly Convention and Occluded Ultimate Meaning: In Worldly and Conventional Understanding, Ultimate Meaning is Always Hidden

The world of illusory imagination is base, vulgar, mean, and totally devoid of any reflective awareness. It is the world of ignorant and evil persons, thieves, and murderers. It contains all types: those who aspire to learning and virtue and those who have an interest in neither, reflective people and people without the least iota of awareness, those who seek God, those who do not, and those who violently reject God.

This world of the conventional is totally clouded over and occluded by primal ignorance. If "it is worldly convention because it is clouded over," (*anena saṃvriyata iti saṃvṛtiḥ*), it follows that that which is clouded over (*etat saṃvriyate*) is, of course, reality and suchness—ultimate meaning in contrast to worldly convention. In his *Lucid Exposition*, Candrakīrti uses the term *sāṃvṛta* to contrast "that which is worldly and conventional" with *saṃvṛti* or worldly convention. Now what is expressed as "*that which* is worldly and conventional" is itself ultimate meaning and is synonymous with "that which is clouded over." The distinctions are rather finely drawn and indeed reflect the subtle difference between the original Sanskrit terms for worldly convention and ultimate meaning.

Here we must return to a question treated above. In his *Introduction to the Middle*, Candrakīrti says that the character of worldly convention is the clouded occlusion of basic misunderstanding through falsifiable illusions. He says that "worldly convention is primal ignorance because it occludes the essence" (6.28). Here, the term essence refers to the reality of awakened wisdom, namely, truth. In the phrase, "empty and without essence," essence is that which is mistakenly clung to by the worldly and conventionally minded and therefore to be negated. But

one cannot negate the essence of ultimate reality. The essence (or Dharma) body of Buddha is final truth. The declaration that all things are empty and without essence is not meant to deny that there is indeed something ultimately meaningful within ultimately meaningful "silence." Ignorance is delusion because it blinds us and prevents us from gaining insight into that essence. Through primal ignorance worldly convention clings to what is not and regards it as essential being, superimposing illusory being upon imagined essences. It loses sight of essence as true being and falls either into imparting illusory being to what is empty or dislodging true being in favor of nothingness.

How then can worldly convention ever be referred to as the *truth* of worldly convention? How can what is basically misunderstanding and ignorance become truth? Worldly convention is neither directly nor necessarily the truth of worldly convention. Worldly convention is described as truth only within the context of worldly convention, not in the context of wisdom. Common worldlings view dependently co-arisen, conditioned (*saṃskṛta*), compounded (*kṛtimatva*) beings as real essences and regard their own ideas about those essences as truth (*satya*). This is truth seen from the standpoint of worldly convention. These very same ideas are regarded by the wise as "merely conventional" (*saṃvṛti-mātra*), as not being true at all.

This "merely conventional" is not only not ultimate meaning, but also is not truth in any sense whatsoever. The reason is that ultimate meaning is ineffable, while worldly convention is formed by language (*vyavahāra*). The reason why worldly convention is called "worldly convention" and described as clouded and occluded by primal ignorance is that essential being is regarded as truth not by the wise but by common worldlings. They apprehend dependently co-arising being as essential truth, thus clouding and obstructing the ability of worldly convention to express truth. This clouded and occluded state of mind makes conditioned beings that arise and pass away appear to sentient beings as true essences, but this is worldly, defectible (*laukika-viparyāsa*) truth. It is not truth, but rather the appearance of truth within convention shaped by language. It is not ultimately meaningful truth—since essences do not exist—but neither is it worldly and conventional truth, since the apprehension of essences obviates insight into dependent co-arising. Seen with the insight of wisdom, it is the surfacing of the mere appearance of truth, of mere worldly convention. This approach points the way to the Yogācāra theme of other-dependent consciousness with its implications that everything is only conscious construction and dependent co-arising.

The usage of the two terms *saṃvṛti* (clouding) and *sāṃvṛta* (that

which is clouded) is important here. As noted in the previous chapter, Theodore Stcherbatsky was probably the first to realize the significance of the term *sāṃvṛta.*[1] *Saṃvṛti*, as in the phrase *saṃvriyate'nena*, means an active clouding over and occluding. In contrast *sāṃvṛta*, as shown in the phrase *saṃvriyata etad*, refers to that which is clouded over and occluded, or in Stcherbatsky's words, that which is "under the surface," the core of emptiness within worldly convention that is truth and suchness. It is that which lies under the surface of appearances, the non-differentiation (*antadvayarahitatva*) of being and non-being, the non-duality (*advaita*) of subject and object. Although both are traced back to the same original term *saṃvṛti*, the one denotes worldly convention as falsifiable and mistaken, while the other indicates ultimate meaning as the truth that is obsfucated in the process. Hence, the clouded reality of suchness is no different from the worldly convention that does the clouding. Clouded being, just as it is, is the suchness of reality. This is the understanding of suchness (*tathatā*) and reality (*tattva*) that prevails in Buddhism. Unlike *saṃvṛti*, the term *sāṃvṛta* can carry the meaning of emptiness.

The description of *saṃvṛti* as "privation and absence" (*vinā nāsti*) indicates a relationship of opposition, such as the mutually contrasting features of long and short, or of large and small, to take obvious examples. These features, while relative to one another, are present only in one pole. They are said to arise in mutual dependency, because they could not be described as opposites if they were not related in a way that what is present in one is lacking in its opposite. But to say that the clouded is not separate from the clouding, or that there is no awakening from ignorance, cannot be understood in this pattern of opposition between mutually dependent things. If insight is merely the absence of ignorance, then it is not insight into truth. Insight is an understanding of the true reality of ignorance. Suchness and reality are not relative to non-suchness and non-reality. Relationships of opposition like this belong to dependent co-arising, but they are not suchness. The identity of clouding (*saṃvṛti*) with reality just as it is (*sāṃvṛta*) means that suchness and reality must lie hidden within that clouding.

Thus, dependent co-arising is worldly convention (*saṃvṛti*), but also includes the reality that is clouded over (*sāṃvṛta*). Our everyday existence is dependently co-arisen, and we live within the birth-death cycle without any awareness of what is above or any cognizance of our fallen existence. We may discourse on transcendence, but as long as that transcendence is not consciously seen as the Tathāgata's grace of reengagement, it is not true transcendence.

All we can say is that there is an underlying potential for transcendence in virtue of the fact that the quest for an ideal within the transient flow of our lives implies a drive toward ascendence. Our dependently co-arising lives can be described as human constructs (*kṛtima-pratītyasamutpāda*) in the sense that the lives we make for ourselves head directly toward death. In contrast to this dependent co-arising, the clouded dependent co-arising of that which is clouded (*sāṃvṛta-pratītya-samutpāda*) is dependently co-arising reengagement with the world through the non-abiding cessation of the bodhisattva. This is the arising of Buddha nature in the world, the coming to be of suchness.

The great deeds of the Buddha recorded in the scriptures, such as the manifestation of transformation bodies and the rewarding of vows, are all dependently co-arisen. There are no deeds whatsoever, awakened or otherwise, that are not dependently co-arisen. All deeds bespeak the dependent co-arising of awakening, and hence must be regarded as a worldly and conventional occurrence. But they are not merely worldly and conventional; they are *saṃvṛta*, but not *saṃvṛti.* On a first level, worldly convention is established in the illusions (or clouded occlusions) of foolish sentient beings. The deeds of the Buddha are the dependent co-arising of that which is clouded over and hidden from sentient beings. On the one hand, this dependent co-arising as worldly convention is empty of essence, both in the sense that sentient beings are immersed in primal ignorance and in the sense of humanly constructed and conditioned being. On the other hand, it is a dependent co-arising in which true reality does indeed exist in a clouded over and occluded mode, in which emptiness of essence is present as the "being" of worldly convention. The first kind of dependent co-arising is perverted worldly convention, while the second is the insight of the sage into worldly convention-only. Transcendence is awakening from worldly convention as erroneous to emptiness as ultimately meaningful. The drive for reengagement in the world represents the complementary movement from ultimate meaning to an understanding that everything is worldly convention, that is, to an awareness of worldly convention as clouded.

Thus, the truth of worldly convention is an appearance (*avabhāsa*) in which essential beings are identified with truth within a consciousness that does not recognize them as humanly constructed, dependently co-arisen beings. But the *truth* of worldly convention is more forcefully enunciated when we regard it as the dependently co-arisen reinvolvement of that which is clouded, as worldly convention-only. Truth is not found within the illusory context of worldly convention, but only in an awakened affirmation of worldly convention, the worldly convention

not of the common worldling but of the sage.

But we have yet to find literal affirmation of these notions in these Mādhyamika textual sources. The understanding of everything as worldly convention means that truth must be described as non-existent, whether as ultimately meaningful or as worldly and conventional. Similar ideas are to be found among the Vijñaptimātra thinkers who used the term "arising" (*saṃvṛtti*) more frequently in thematizing worldly convention than "the clouding" (*saṃvṛti*) of primal ignorance and who regarded the truth of worldly convention as a manifestation (*udbhāvanā*) of full perfection.[2]

True and False Worldly Convention: How is Worldly Convention Restored as True in a Context of Ultimate Meaning?

The sources present yet another twofold division of the truth of worldly convention: true worldly convention (*tathya-saṃvṛti*) and false worldly convention (*mithyā-saṃvṛti*). In his *Introduction to the Middle*, Candrakīrti explains:

> Human opinion (worldly convention) is twofold: sound perception and defective perception. The understandings of defective perception are termed false because they contradict the understandings of sound perception (6.24).

Since worldly convention contrasts with ultimate meaning, in itself it is always provisional. Whether one is reflectively aware of it or not, worldly convention is the clouded occlusion of primal ignorance.

Worldly convention as knowledge in the world shows two further aspects. As explained above, the distinction between worldly convention and ultimate meaning is a differentiation in knowing. This is then transposed to the side of the known, resulting in a distinction of truth and falsehood in regard to the content known. Now, in connection with worldly convention, a distinction between true and false worldly convention can also be drawn from the subjective side between sound and defective perception. The former is true worldly convention; the latter is false worldly convention. Defective perception means that those whose sense faculties are obstructed or defective mistake what is for what is not and what is not for what is. Clear perceptions free of malfunction show up such perceptions as false and erroneous.

The person of sound perception and discerning senses, on the other

hand, recognizes what is in the world as being, and what is not as non-being. For example, a person with defective eyes may see colors flickering in the sky or a person with a hearing abnormality may hear sounds that are not there. For such persons, those sights and sounds are real, but one whose senses are normal and healthy will reject them as hallucinations. Not only illness or defective organs are responsible for false perceptions. Buddhist literature gives other examples as well, like the blind men who mistake the flank of an elephant for a wall; or people who see pools of water in the mirages of the noonday sun or shrink from a piece of rope seen on a road at dusk, thinking it to be a snake. Such false worldly conventions are not blamed only on the malfunction of sense organs. Thinkers like Śaṅkara held to the false idea of a self (*ātman*), and the Saṃkhya philosophers mistakenly affirmed the reality of the three qualities (*guṇa*) within that self, beyond the range of ordinary perception, but deducible by theoretical reason (*vicāra*). This knowledge, too, is often qualified by sound intelligence as false worldly convention. Their theories did not take into account the social provenance of worldly convention. To refute them, no recourse to ultimate meaning is necessary, worldly and conventional reasoning and understanding is sufficient. In Buddhist teaching, theory does not hold an exalted position above ordinary (worldly) awareness and is often regarded as the source of error, thus receiving a role in understanding truth lower than "sound worldly awareness."

In contrast to the errors mentioned above, true worldly convention consists in a critical awareness of beings as they appear before one's eyes. Conventional truth is described as true when the perception is sound and the reasoning free of error. The refutation of any theory or assertion must employ only the criteria of worldly convention, since all judgment and all refutation take their meaning from their social context. Their truth is demonstrated (*prasiddha*) through social agreement and established in a linguistic context (*vyavahriyate*). Meaning is always embodied in a socially structured language. As *The Introduction to the Middle* teaches:

> The objects [perceived by the] six sound senses are understood within the world. This is truth from the perspective of the world. Moreover, falsity is also established from the perspective of the world (6.25; de a Vallée Poussin, p. 104).

Thus, the truth of worldly and conventional understanding is true only as worldly convention and only within a worldly and conventional context. False worldly convention is what is already untrue within that context.

The *Introduction to the Middle* further describes the state of being of common worldlings as comprising both "that which is experienced and that which is not experienced" (6.28ff). Because it is shrouded primal ignorance, the true essence and reality of Buddha-nature do not appear to and is not experienced by common worldlings. The Buddha is not seen and what is seen is not the Buddha. Everything experienced belongs to the realm of dependently co-arising beings, which appear as having self-existent essences precisely because the world is shrouded in primal ignorance. Within appearances come illusions and fantasies—like the "self" of the unbelievers—but reality and truth are also present—like colors or the mental activities of sensing and conceiving. Only these latter are sound worldly and conventional truth. The fantasies of unbelievers with their theories of selfhood are false even for worldly convention. The adjudication of their truth or falsity, however, functions entirely within the perspective of the world and not from the standpoint of Mādhyamika.

The truth of worldly convention remains yoked to and derived from one-dimensional, primal ignorance. It is because of primal ignorance that it is the truth of worldly convention. Worldly and conventional reason is always and everywhere clouded by primal ignorance. This does not mean that primal ignorance positively establishes the *truth* of worldly convention, but only that, even though we may call it simply truth, it still contains within itself primal ignorance and is established on the basis of primal ignorance. For this reason it is not truth for the sage or bodhisattva who has broken ties with primal ignorance. Although it remains the dependent co-arising of humanly constructed being, it is "worldly convention-only," not the truth of worldly convention. Again, these objects (*gocara*) exist for the sage as long as he perceives and acts, and appearances exist as long as he turns toward those objects and judges them. Because they "appear," they are worldly and conventional, not the turth of worldly convention. What common worldlings regard as ultimate meaning and truth, is "worldly convention-only" for the sage. For such a one, ultimate meaning resides in the emptiness of "worldly convention-only," that is, in the emptiness of dependent co-arising. For the buddhas to whom such appearances do not occur, full awakening means the absence of any subject-object dichotomy, so that one can not even speak of empty things. In their case, there is no dependent co-arising, and even the word "compassion" cannot be used in an ultimately meaningful sense. Only this ultimate meaning of awakening can be described in terms of essence. Here only is there truly an absence of falsity, a personal realization apart from all language.

Bhāvaviveka also treated true and false worldly convention,[3] but

his interpretation differs from that of Candrakīrti. For Bhāvaviveka, false worldly convention is a false understanding of worldly convention, consisting of an apprehension that grasps the outward being of beings. His concept of false worldly convention is broader than that of Candrakīrti, for whom false worldly convention is primarily defective perception and understanding in the world.

Moreover, Bhāvaviveka describes the true understanding of worldly convention as subsequently attained, purified, worldly wisdom, thus departing radically from Candrakīrti's notion of true worldly convention simply as sound everyday awareness. For Bhāvaviveka true worldly convention is ultimate meaning enunciated (*vyavahriyate*) within the world of experience. It is ultimate meaning manifesting (*prabhāsate, ākhyāpayati*) itself and establishing (*vyavasthāpayati*) its worldly dimension. Arising (*saṃvartate*) within the world, it is worldly convention as a criterion (*pramāṇa*) for the truth of beings in the world. Thus, worldly convention here derives from *saṃvṛtti* and is not to be confused with Candrakīrti's notion of clouded occlusion. It is only false worldly convention that is clouded and occluded by primal ignorance and error, not true worldly convention. False worldly convention, whether or not it is accompanied with reflective discrimination, lacks "the ability to bring about meaning" (*artha-kriyā-kṣama*) that true worldly convention possesses.

This differs from Candrakīrti's notion that all true worldly convention—whether morality, discipline, culture, philosophy, ordinary awareness, or learning—is clouded and occluded because it follows social custom. For Candrakīrti, insofar as anything is worldly and conventional, it is not ultimately meaningful, but belongs to the transient world of compounded and conditioned being based on primal ignorance. Therefore, for Candrakīrti, worldly convention is based on itself and closed in on itself without any direct relationship to ultimate meaning.

Bhāvaviveka teaches that the true understanding of worldly convention is the subsequent attainment of purified understanding in the world. He holds that worldly convention is grounded on and flows from the pure Dharma realm of ultimate meaning. Of course, it remains enclosed within worldly and conventional language, but at the same time it is an outflow from ultimate meaning. This may be related to the fact that Bhāvaviveka defends the essential character of worldly convention against the Yogācāra philosophers, while Candrakīrti holds that worldly convention is lacking in all essential being. Bhāvaviveka, who is identified as a Svātantrika thinker (one who holds that reasoning is independent and self-sufficient), recognizes the authority of verbal reasoning and maintains that the intent of Mādhyamika requires the

establishment of an independent form of argumentation.

Bhāvaviveka's treatment of true worldly convention as the essential being of worldly convention seems to support the validation of the "truth" of worldly convention. Candrakīrti's view that the truth of worldly convention was always clouded and occluded worldly convention implies that true worldly convention (worldly convention-only in the understanding of the wise) is true only for foolish common worldlings. But Bhāvaviveka wishes to ground the truth of worldly convention in ultimate meaning and hence to see it as a subsequent wisdom, emanating from ultimately meaningful perfect awakening. Once this is granted, it follows as a matter of course that worldly convention is to be called "truth." Moreover, it is easy to see how reengagement in the world, descending from ultimate meaning to worldly convention, is validated in such a notion of the truth of worldly convention. In arguing for the essential being of worldly convention, Bhāvaviveka is not far from the Yogācāra thinkers, except that the latter hold that worldly convention is without essential being.

The question remains, however, as to just how a real reengagement in the world can be grounded on the notion of an outflow of worldly convention from ultimate meaning. If ultimate meaning flows directly into true worldly convention, how can it truly be called a "re-engagement in the world from beyond?" In Buddhism, reengagement is not a divine emanation or a participation in the divine. Instead, worldly convention is affirmed just as it is without the intervention of any divine principle. *Saṃvṛti*, just as it is, is *sāṃvṛta*. Reengagement in the world is not the unilinear descent of an absolute and transcendent self into the world, but the coming to be (a turning towards us) of other power, of the totally non-self—as suchness—without the slightest trace of continuity. Ultimate meaning appears within worldly convention, but for the world of humans, it appears only as absolutely other. There is absolute discontinuity from ultimate meaning to worldly convention; the idea of a continuous emanation is simply inconceivable. If there is any continuity between the two truths, any talk of appearance or manifestation, it is worldly and conventional. Thus, worldly convention can be grounded only on what is worldly and conventional: it is always the dependent co-arising of conditioned being. As Candrakīrti teaches, it is always clouded and occluded.

Thus, while Bhāvaviveka's assertion that a true understanding of worldly convention is not clouded or occluded does represent an attempt to validate some reality in worldly convention, it fails to explain the restoration of true worldly convention or reengagement with the world.

Chapter 5

Verbal Quiescence and Reaching Toward Ultimate Meaning

Interpretations of Ultimate Meaning: Conventional Approaches

As far as ultimate meaning and worldly convention refer to objects of understanding (*jñeya*), they can be differentiated into true and false. There is only one world, but it can be described both as ultimate meaning and as worldly convention in the same way that the sage's understanding of it differs from the fool's. Differences in "objective content" reflect these more basic differences in the "subjective" acts of understanding, which means that the conventional distinction between true and false is in fact drawn from the side of the subject. The knowing subject, or the "person," can ground judgments only within the realm of worldly convention, where the clouded occlusion of worldly convention is engendered by primal ignorance by means of a false belief in self.

Of course subject and object cannot be separated. When we speak of the subject, we do not mean to imply a preexistent knower who comes to know objects. In its simplest form, knowing occurs prior to the dichotomy between subject and object; it embraces the differentiations of truth and falsity, and of reality and illusion, as well as that of worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Because of the absolute opposition between wisdom and foolishness, true ultimate meaning and false worldly convention are absolutely contradictory and completely other. How then can we, who do our thinking within the realm of conventional understanding, conceive of ultimate meaning at all?

The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes, a text of the Vijñaptimātra school, offers a threefold analysis of ultimate meaning,[1] similar to that for worldly convention, treated above. But it must be noted that in the Vijñaptimātratā scheme, ultimate meaning is predicated only of the fully-perfected pattern of consciousness, that the other-dependent and

imagined patterns are described as causes (*kāraṇa*) of ultimate meaning, but are never ultimately meaningful themselves. Unlike the parallel alignment of the three kinds of worldly convention with the three patterns of consciousness, which centers around the other-dependent pattern of consciousness, ultimate meaning centers on only the fully-perfected pattern.

The first aspect of ultimate meaning is that of the object (*artha-paramārtha*), which is suchness (*tathatā*). Suchness has to be realized personally and immediately (*sākṣāt-kriyā*), inasmuch as it is the ultimately meaningful object that constitutes realized wisdom. Here the term ultimate (*parama*) meaning (*artha*) is interpreted as the object of ultimate understanding (*paramasya jñānasyārthaḥ*), in other words, as the object and content of world-transcending wisdom.

The second aspect of ultimate meaning is that of attainment (*prāpti-paramārtha*), or cessation (*nirvāṇa*), as fully purified suchness (*ekānta-nirmala-tathatā*). Suchness is that to which one becomes enlightened, that which is realized and attained through the conversion of support (*āśraya-parāvṛtti-lakṣaṇa*). Here, the term ultimate (*parama*) meaning (*artha*) refers to the final end of meaning (*arthasya paramaḥ*), where the term *artha* indicates "benefit," namely, the benefit of cessation liberated from all misfortune that is the final goal of all practice. It is described as the highest benefit because it pervades all conditioned and unconditioned states of being.[2]

The third aspect of ultimate meaning is that of practice (*pratipatti-paramārtha*), or the path (*mārga*) that leads to ultimate meaning as suchness and as cessation. Here the term ultimate (*parama*) meaning (*artha*) is interpreted as "the meaning of that which is ultimate" (*paramo 'syārthaḥ*), referring to the path whose object is suchness and whose objective is cessation. By following such an ultimate and aiming at it as one's goal, the path becomes an aspect and manifestation of ultimate meaning, even though the path itself belongs to the realm of conditioned being.

Such an interpretation of ultimate meaning in terms of its aspects acknowledges no single aspect as adequate. The first two aspects—suchness and cessation—are unconditioned, quiescent, and immovable, and are described as "unchanging full perfection" (*ananyathā-pariniṣpatti*) inasmuch as they are unconditioned. The third aspect—the path—is subject to change as dependently co-arisen, conditioned being. Nonetheless, it is seen as "unerring full perfection" (*aviparyāsa-pariniṣpatti*), by which is meant that it follows and harmonizes with suchness and cessation unerringly. Paraphrasing somewhat, the first two aspects are what must be fully perfected (*pariniṣpannatva*), while the third is the practice (*pratipad*) that actually perfects (*pariniṣpatti*) them.

These interpretations of ultimate meaning in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* and Sthiramati's *Commentary* on that text, both compositions of the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra school, are almost identical with that of the Mādhyamika thinker Bhāvaviveka.[3] If we compare his explanation with the sequence of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, the first aspect is described by Bhāvaviveka as "the object of the ultimate" (*paramasyārthaḥ*). Here the ultimate is "ultimate non-discriminative wisdom," while the object (*artha*) of this non-discrimination (*parama-artha*) is described by means of a syntactic Sanskrit compound (*tatpuruṣa*) in which the terms *parama* and *artha* are related grammatical by different case endings: *artha* is interpreted as nominative, "the object," and *parama* as genitive (*paramasya*), "of that which is ultimate." This corresponds perfectly with the commentary of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* on suchness.

Bhāvaviveka treats the second aspect by unpacking the relationships of the Sanskrit compound *parama-artha* as a compound of agreement (*karmadhāraya*) in which the members are in grammatical case agreement: thus, here *parama-artha* means "both ultimacy and meaning" (*paramaś ca arthaś ca*). The term "ultimate" (*parama*) signifies the highest (*uttama*) and the term "meaning" (*artha*) signifies that which is to be understood (*jñātavya*). In other words, ultimate meaning is the highest meaning. It is not simply a knowable object, for it cannot be acquired through knowing. This corresponds directly to the description of cessation in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes.* This meaning is further explained by Bhāvaviveka as "that which is to be investigated" (*vicārayitavya*) and "that which is to be realized" (*pratipādya*).

The third aspect in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, the path, is described by Bhāvaviveka as "being in harmony with ultimate meaning" (*paramārtha-anukūla*). Here "the wisdom insights are in harmony with ultimate meaning" and included within the purview of ultimate meaning.

It seems clear from the foregoing that Bhāvaviveka's interpretation of ultimate meaning is almost identical to that of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes.* Moreover, since he sees suchness and cessation as qualitatively different from "being in harmony with ultimate meaning," he is led to distinguish further between ultimate meaning as non-analogical and as analogical.

> Non-analogical (*aparyāya*) ultimate meaning does not come to appear and is not fabricated in concepts (*prapañca*), while analogical ultimate meaning does come to appear and is fabricated in concepts.[4]

"Analogical" here means capable of verbal articulation through synonyms. It describes ultimate meaning as it is posited through conceptual expression by a human agent (*abhisaṃskāra*). In contrast, non-analogical ultimate meaning does not appear in any conceptualized form. The first and second aspects of ultimate meaning, suchness and cessation, correspond to this non-analogical ultimate meaning. As the content of ultimate wisdom, suchness and cessation are both ineffable, whether the compound *parama-artha* be read as a syntactic compound or a compound of agreement. Non-analogical ultimate meaning refers to the inability to articulate suchness or cessation verbally. Since it "harmonizes" with that which is non-analogical through a commitment to practice (*adhimukti*), the third aspect of ultimate meaning as enunciation embraces human discourse, reasoning, and the teaching on the path.

As the path of practice, conceptual understanding is not only a "subsequently-attained-wisdom" issuing from non-conceptual, non-discriminative wisdom. Non-analogical ultimate meaning is fundamental, non-discriminative wisdom, which is world-transcending and undefiled. But analogical ultimate meaning is a purified worldly wisdom that harmonizes and functions in synergy with non-discriminative wisdom, and which cannot necessarily be limited to the wisdom attained subsequent to awakening. This "being in harmony with" must be grounded on a basic commitment to practice (*adhimukti*). In the commentarial literature, "being in harmony" is explained as "acting in harmony with the two requisites of merit and wisdom" in the context of worldly understanding. "Being in harmony with ultimate meaning" is further explained as "intelligent inquiry" (*yoniśovicāra*), true understanding, and investigation into reality through correct reasoning (*yukti, nyāya*). Inasmuch as it aims at truth, this acting in harmony with truth is "purified wisdom," but inasmuch as it is described as "being in harmony," it remains worldly understanding. It is not, however, simply descendent inasmuch as it also strives to ascend from below toward the truth. Such inquiry and reasoning encompass learning in general, including philosophical and logical endeavors. Indeed, this is the meaning of the worldly and conventional. Since it falls within the realm of common worldlings, this learning is conditioned and defiled, but, since it is also in harmony with true reality, it can be said to be ultimately meaningful. Any learning process, such as the model of a graded path, differs from the quietude of cessation in that it establishes clearly defined stages one above the other in its constant ascent toward transcendence. The course of such a path is ultimately meaningful insofar as it is in harmony with reality. This interpretation of the ultimate meaning of following the path is

also present in the second explanation of ultimate meaning as cessation, which was touched on above. For when cessation is described as "that which must be understood," the implication is that it must be penetrated, realized, and reached. Since cessation is the goal of the path of inquiry and insight, its pursuit means that the path itself is conditioned ultimate meaning. The path is not simply a process of descent and reengagement, but it must also really constitute an ascendent reflection within the context of everyday practice.

"Ultimate meaning as being in harmony" has an important role to play in connection with the notions of non-arising, no-essence, and emptiness. Our world is not simply nonexistent and empty. We actually do exist in it. As active beings, we are forever acting upon the world and are in turn acted upon by the world. But this constantly changing world—encompassing us who act as though we were separate from the world, even while we are born within it—"exists" only as worldly convention. In the realm of ultimate meaning (*paramārthatas*), our impermanent, fleeting world must be described as empty and without essence. From the perspective of ultimate meaning, the world must be negated, but if it is to remain ultimately meaningful, it must also be understood in a conventional and rational manner.

What does it mean to understand the conventional world "as ultimately meaningful?" If ultimate meaning is only suchness and cessation, then it belongs to a realm beyond speech and thought. In such a realm, denial and negation are impossible and there is no room for talk about anything as "ultimately meaningful," since negation entails the negation of some verbal affirmation. Negation is not of itself ultimately meaningful, but remains forever worldly and conventional. Thus, the "ultimate meaning" used to designate the non-being of our conventional world "as ultimately meaningful" is neither suchness nor cessation. It is ultimately meaningful as a "being in harmony," as a reaching out to suchness. The passage from dependent co-arising to emptiness—the fact that "as ultimately meaningful" the world of our dependent co-arising conventions can be described as empty and without essence, neither arising nor passing away—implies the achievement of harmony with ultimate meaning, but not the achievement of fundamental, non-discriminative wisdom. It is enough to follow correct reasoning as an "intelligent inquiry" into dependent co-arising.

Silence as Absolute Otherness: The Ground of Negation

The realm of ultimate meaning is therefore entirely transcendent

to worldly convention. When the adverbial phrase "as ultimately meaningful" is predicated of any doctrinal notion, it signifies no more than a being in harmony with ultimate meaning. True ultimate meaning—suchness and cessation—consists in the reality (*dharmatā*) of emptiness as opposed to realities (*dharma*) in the world. Ultimate meaning cannot be grasped in worldly, conventional understanding or discourse. The term "ultimate meaning" itself entails a complete transcendence of worldly and conventional thinking and reasoning. Ultimate meaning is absolutely other than worldly convention mediated through words; conversely, the worldly and conventional is powerless in the face of ultimate meaning. Even though ultimate meaning cannot be captured by worldly convention, this does not allow us to conclude that it does not exist. On the contrary, it issues from the deepest wellsprings of worldly convention as a matter of exigency. Nor can we deny the exigency of worldly convention, inasmuch as its ascendent orientation to truth and discarding of falsehood and illusion (including worldly convention itself when a false assertion of worldly convention is negated by a true one) is always a matter of reaching forth toward ultimate meaning. Out of inner exigency, worldly conventional understanding stretches forth to transcend itself and enter a realm of ultimate meaning not its own. All human philosophy inexorably pursues this same course. Worldly convention dies to itself and is realized in being reborn within another. Here worldly convention has no self-power and no self-existence (*svatantra*), but is other-powered and other-dependent (*paratantra*). It is because ultimate meaning stands absolutely apart from worldly convention, as something completely other, that it is described as ineffable (*avācyatva*) and accessible only in the form of concentrated wisdom (*samāpatti-jñāna*). The scattered wisdom found in the realm of worldly convention is of no avail here. What is called for is the concentrated wisdom of the sage that leaps beyond in transcendence.

The true form of Mādhyamika refutation (*pratiṣedha*) is based on the absolute otherness of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. In the *Stanzas on the Middle*, the being of all beings—all coming and going, all arising and passing away, unity and differentiation, severance and eternity—is negated. But it is not in negating one proposition by means of another that the text goes on to validate yet another proposition within the same context of conventional discourse. Emptiness without essence is rather a direct negation of the very context itself within which propositions can be opposed to one another. Thus, emptiness consists in a single, absolute denial and negation of the entire worldly and conventional dimension of discourse that seeks to validate the reality of countless competing truth claims.

Absolute denial, therefore, cannot consist in speech and reasoning. It must be a unique silence beyond all language. Vimalakīrti's silence in *The Scripture of Vimalakīrti* is said to resound like the thunder. In his *Lucid Exposition*, Candrakīrti states that "ultimate meaning is the silence (*tūṣṇīṃbhāva*) of the saints."[5] Silence is the exact opposite of the fabrication (*prapañca*) of words and ideas. Silence is something distant from all fabricated discourse, all attempts to identify what cause brings about what result, or what it is that is born and passes away, and even, in the case of awakened cessation, the statement that nothing passes away and nothing does not pass away. Everything that comes to be in language, including all worldly conventional negations, are not in fact negations at all. The true working of negation is found in silence. This is the import of the identification of dependent co-arising (verbal worldly convention) with emptiness (ultimate meaning).

Thus, in the chapter "On the Examination of Self" of the Chinese translation of *The Stanzas on the Middle*, Nāgārjuna explains:

> The reality of all beings
> Neither arises nor passes away,
> For, since mental activity and speech are severed,
> They are quiescent as in cessation (18.7).

This is not a denial of everyday phenomenal change, just as the quiescence that is like cessation is not quiescence as a reassertion of fabrication. The Sanskrit text reads:

> When there is a quiescence of mental activity,
> Then the need for discourse ceases and
> Reality, like unto cessation,
> Neither arises nor passes away.
>
> nivṛttam abhidhātavyaṃ nivṛtte cittagocare/
> anutpannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇam iva dharmatā//18.7//

Ultimate meaning is ineffable not because it negates language, but because it is devoid of all mental activity. When the mind functions in its own sphere of activity, beings take the form of objects and speech enters in to decribe them. But in the cessation-like reality that neither comes to be nor passes away, there are no objects for the mind to work on. A later verse states:

> Not known through another, quiescent,
> Not fabricated through fabrication,

> That which, being non-discriminative, is undifferentiated,
> That is the mark of reality.
>
> a-para-pratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcair aprapañcitaṃ/
> nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇaṃ//18.9//

Here the terms "quiescent, not fabricated" and "non-discriminative" denote that all ultimate meaning absolutely transcends worldly convention and speech. The phrase "not known through another" does not mean that understanding reality is not other-dependent, but that it does not depend on someone else's account, being experienced personally and immediately. The term "undifferentiated" means that ultimate meaning is simple suchness. Once ultimate meaning is seen to exist apart from the generation of words and concepts, there is no differentiation of meaning between self and other, unity and difference, and so forth, as when one being has many descriptions or one term many meanings. Thus, "the mark of reality" transcends worldly convention absolutely and, as Candrakīrti explains, must be described as the mark of emptiness (*śūnyatālakṣaṇa*). This was also the intention behind the passage in the invocational stanza of *The Stanzas on the Middle* praising the Tathāgata's doctrine by way of the eightfold negation as "the blissful absence of fabrication." Because it is unfabricated and ineffable, ultimate meaning is inaccessible to worldly convention. Like the clouded occlusion of ultimate meaning in worldly convention, this is due to the absolute otherness that separates them one from the other.

Reaching Toward Ultimate Meaning: The Worldly and Conventional Ground for Ideas of Ultimate Meaning

Despite the fact that worldly convention is a clouding and occluding of truth, it always turns and reaches out for ultimate meaning. Clouding and occluding implies that the path to the suchness of being is being obstructed for worldly convention; it is not simply a matter of biological or instinctual blindness acting spontaneously and without any intervention of the will. Worldly convention wills and acts according to its own logic.

To embrace the root illusion of a self underlying one's designs and actions (the self desiring itself to be an ultimately meaningful being) is to live with one's eyes closed to the reality of ultimate meaning. This

illusory self is often conceived of as a real substance whose existence cannot be doubted. In fact, it is real only within the horizon of worldly convention. The "reality" of the self is a provisionally established theory on whose basis worldly convention is articulated in language and ideas. It is impossible simply to dispense with the notion of self in distinguishing truth from falsehood, or good from evil, but these distinctions rest on worldly convention. This blind, worldly convention that clouds and occludes insight stems from an uncritical belief in the fundamental being of self. The reason why worldly convention is said to be "occluded and clouded" is that belief in self and belief in the being of beings that follows from it are blind to ultimate meaning.

The demand of self itself to be ultimately meaningful issues in a host of theories about selfhood (*ātmavāda*). Because the self seeks to exercise and maintain autonomy at all times, it is only natural that it evolves an ideal of an ultimately meaningful mastery and independence. Without this ideal, it would be impossible to generate so much as a single word of worldly convention, let alone any decision or action. The autonomous self is grounded in worldly convention and cannot get beyond a worldly and conventional understanding of ultimate meaning. If true ultimate meaning surpasses all worldly and conventional correlations of ideas, then the self occludes true ultimate meaning. Even though the self is itself deemed to be the carrier of ultimate meaning, that meaning never leaves the realm of worldly convention. On the contrary, it forms its very ground, and hence remains not empty but dependently co-arisen. To be a ground for something else is to be dependently co-arisen. Categories like "basic reality" and "the substance of things" are able to be conceived only because they are verbally and conventionally co-arisen.

The emptiness of ultimate meaning cannot be elicited from dependently co-arisen being in this way. The ground of being is always being, and it makes no sense to claim non-being could fulfill that role. If non-being is to be the ground of being, its relationship to being must be drastically different from the relationship that obtains among beings within dependent co-arising. As mentioned above, there is no emanation from non-being to being. To say that non-being does not become the ground of being, that it does not exist as a ground, and that this is the ground for being is to speak in terms of ultimate truth. Only when being as originally present is seen as the ground of being, here and now, only when the co-arising flux from being to being is seen as beginningless, can the foundational character of non-being appear within the chain of being itself. In that case, being's "ground" in non-being is that of a "beginningless" birth-death cycle, that of a constant threat of falling into nothingness

by its tenuous hold on existence, grounded and dependent only upon being itself since there is nothing else.

Worldly convention arises as the order of being, differentiating self through fabrication and occluded by primal ignorance. From the beginning worldly convention is illusory and deceptive. The blindness of worldly convention is not only instinctual and impulsive, but, as the clouding and occluding of primal ignorance, testifies to the existence of its own powerlessness. In so far as reason and language and the consciously willed actions of the self are instrumental in bringing about worldly and conventional ideas, they lack even the instinctual animal simplicity and signal a state of being lower than animals. The natural bond between the blindness of worldly convention to ultimate meaning and its descent into darkness means that there is present an inclination toward to bottomless pit of falsehood, debasement, and evil that is impossible to resist. Human beings in this sense are beneath the animals and need to repent of their sins. All this is due to the constant and exclusive autonomy of the self. Sin does not come from something external to the self, but arises co-dependently with the self. We may in this sense call this original self our "original sin," but it can never really be a constant and exclusive autonomous self. It remains conventionally co-arisen and as such cannot be ultimately meaningful.

But, even at the depths of its depravity, worldly convention does not abandon its search for ultimate meaning and its urge to ascend. This downward pull of consciousness that simultaneously tends toward self-transcendence is an "ineffable mystery." The very awareness of one's own depravity seems to awaken a yearning for what is above. The more the self is pulled down, the more it tries to lift itself up. Worldly and conventional awareness, even in its degenerate, clouded, and occluded ignorance, points beyond itself and reaches out toward the world of light and ultimate meaning. If ultimate meaning is in this sense an exigency of worldly convention, then it must somehow be present within worldly convention. And if this is the case, might not we say that ultimate meaning is not absolutely other but somehow continuous with worldly convention?

In fact, there is some such continuity between worldly convention and ultimate meaning. (One thinks here, for example, of the progressively ascending stages of the path.) Even though the transition from practice to attainment is said to move temporally from the present to the future, the transition from unenlightenment to enlightenment always takes place in the present. The Buddha could not exist if sentient beings did not become awakened. This points to an ascending, transcending continuity between sentient beings and the Buddha.

Within the realm of the self, worldly convention is continually falling into despair. Its desire for other-power is a longing for what is ultimately meaningful, even though, in the final issuance it is actually incapable of satisfying that longing. True ultimate meaning cannot be found within worldly convention and the ultimate meaning that is aspired for does not go beyond the worldly and conventional. Similarly, any God created by human beings must be a worldly and conventional God, and cannot be ultimately meaningful. Even in its continuity with worldly convention, true ultimate meaning remains entirely and completely other in full discontinuity. Even though worldly convention always reaches out toward ultimate meaning, it cannot attain anything ultimately meaningful because ultimate meaning supersedes articulation. And just as ultimate meaning cannot be described in words and surpasses all conceptualizations, so it cannot be sought by worldly convention and transcends all human manipulation.

In short, since ultimate meaning is always completely other than worldly convention and admits of no continuity with it, the affirmation of the self as ultimately meaningful is empty boasting. It is no more than the arrogance of supposing that worldly convention could rightfully trespass into the realm of ultimate meaning. There is nothing in ultimate meaning (of course) or in worldly convention to support such presumption. As worldly and conventional, conventional reasoning that seeks ultimate meaning—true reasoning (*yukti*)—reveals only that there is no self in the realm of ultimate meaning. The exercise of verbal, logical reasoning itself uncovers the contradiction: no theory of selfhood can validate any self. All the negations of *The Stanzas on the Middle* converge at the point of exposing this single contradiction: an ultimate meaningful self can never validate any ultimate meaning of selfhood. This is the import of all the reasoning in *The Stanzas on the Middle*. The claim that seeing sees neither others nor itself (3.2) not only means that worldly convention cannot come in contact with ultimate meaning, but serves as a metaphor for the fact that, if it meddles in ultimate meaning through metaphysical theories deemed absolutely true, it cannot avoid violating worldly convention itself. Selfhood cannot be validated either by worldly, conventional reasoning or by any world-transcending ultimate meaning, which is simply silence.

Does this imply that once all worldly and conventional thinking and philosophizing have been abandoned, the saint has no possible rational approach (*upapatti*) to ultimate meaning? Candrakīrti answers: "Who can say whether there is or not?" and "For the saint it is a matter of silence."[6] Who can say that a rational approach does not exist for the saint? And who can say that it does? To say either is to forfeit silence.

Silence stands apart from all speech, negative or positive, and is ultimate meaning.

The relationship between ultimate meaning and worldly convention, we have seen, must be one of complete otherness and discontinuity. All facile talk of ultimate meaning forgets this otherness and discontinuity.

Chapter 6

The Two Truths and the Path

The Relationship Between the Two Truths: Absolutely Other Yet Striving to Come Together

As explained above, the structural relationship between the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention is both centripetal and centrifugal, both continuous and discontinuous. In seeking their oneness and identity, it must not be forgotten that they are absolutely other and completely disparate, even though worldly convention always aims at ultimate meaning by trying to become ultimately meaningful and to identify with ultimate meaning. The ascending path of causality from worldly convention to ultimate meaning is the great path leading from the cultivation of practice to the attainment of awakening; from the very outset ultimate meaning is elicited from the exigencies of worldly convention. It is here that one finds the centripetal meaning of the two truths.

If ultimate meaning were never to rely on worldly convention, it would not manifest itself.[1] Only within a dependent co-arising that is identical with emptiness can ultimate meaning be enunciated. It is in this sense that we may speak of worldly convention and ultimate meaning being drawn together, centripetally. As noted earlier, one aspect of this centripetal character is that worldly convention as "manifesting" ultimate meaning parallels ultimate meaning as "being in harmony with" worldly convention. But this in no way prevents the two truths from being related as absolutely other. Worldly convention is never ultimately meaningful; it is never the awakened realm of non-discriminative wisdom, inaccessible to speech. It is a clouded and occluded verbalization that ultimate meaning transcends to find its ultimacy in the total absence of any trace of worldly convention. In this light, the two are centrifugal and mutually disparate, not in the least identifiable: just as worldly convention cannot break into the realm of ultimate

meaning, so ultimate meaning cannot usurp authority over the being of worldly convention.

In contrast to the multiplicity of worldly conventions, ultimate meaning is simple. Where worldly convention is segmented and polymorphous in it co-arisen verbalizations, ultimate meaning, as the unification of multiplicity, is simple. But to stop short at this opposition of multiplicity and simplicity is to fail to see how they can be simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal, continuous and discontinuous. The attribution of simplicity derives from the principle of selfhood. Even the worldly and conventional realm is itself a simple unity in its elemental selfhood, rising out of the exigencies of worldly convention and aiming at ultimately meaningful existence. The self confronts worldly convention as something ultimately meaningful in itself, it analyzes worldly convention into its constituent parts, and elevates itself to the role of synthesizer of worldly multiplicity. Yet, at the very instant that selfhood is constituted, it immediately collapses into world convention. In true ultimate meaning there is no self to be constituted. Ultimate meaning is set apart, ineffable, inconceivable, and unjudicable. Only within the idealistic, historical, rationalistic world—the framework of the birth-death cycle—is unity is conceived in contrast to fragmented particularity. This is not the unity predicated of ultimate meaning. A organization of parts into a unified whole is worldly and conventional. Therefore, while worldly convention represents the whole world as it exists and maintains itself as a unified whole, it does not belong to the realm of ultimate meaning. Worldly convention is described as a single, all-embracing world because there is no other world apart from it: the world *is* the world of total unity.

This is not to say that there is no other way to describe the single, all-embracing world except in terms of worldly convention. On the contrary, quite apart from worldly convention, the world exists as "ultimately meaningful." In other words, ultimate meaning, far from being restricted to the unification of worldly conventions, is rather its reversal: it is the deconstruction of worldly convention. The world is described as conventional because of the clouded occlusion of its basic ignorance. Any synthesis of the fragmented multiplicity of its clouded and occluded being, no matter how often achieved or at how high a level, cannot transcend worldly convention. In its loftiest articulation, such synthesis remains within the realm of worldly convention.

Yet, despite its worldly and conventional nature, such synthesis is formed of a centripetal attraction between the two truths, evidenced in both the ascent from unenlightenment to enlightenment and in the reengagement of a buddha in bodhisattva practice in the world.

This is why the two truths keep their centripetal character. The relationship of absolute otherness that characterizes the two truths as completely separate is found in both worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Transcendence implies the absence of continuity and centripetal attraction, and yet these very qualities mean that the world, just as it is, becomes ultimately meaningful.

It follows that the mutual relationship between worldly convention and ultimate meaning as both centripetal and centrifugal implies both self-estrangement and self-negation. Worldly convention seeks an ultimately meaningful mode of being for selfhood in virtue of which to transcend that self. But any ultimate meaning that can be discovered cannot, for that very reason, be truly ultimate. As relevant to and circumscribed within the realm of worldly convention, it can never be anything more than the highest achievement of worldly convention itself. The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. The moon itself is elsewhere. There is no escaping the fact that "ultimate meaning is never ultimately meaningful." Any ultimate meaning apprehended in the assertions of worldly convention is always circumscribed within an worldly and convention negation of self and is not itself ultimate meaning, which stands apart as "a negation of all worldly conventions."

The frequent appearance in the scriptures of self-alienating expressions, such as "there is neither being, nor non-being, nor being and non-being" or "charity is charity because there is no charity" are all based on the relationship of the two truths as we have been discussing it here. Similarly, we might say that worldly convention is worldly convention because it negates worldly convention, or that ultimate meaning is ultimate meaning because it negates ultimate meaning. These are not just eccentric utterances, born of some particular affection for conundrums, or the inability to make clear judgments.

What is said here of the movement from worldly convention to ultimate meaning applies equally to the movement from ultimate meaning to worldly convention. While ultimate meaning always leaves a trace image within worldly convention, that image tends to grow faint and the contours of its reflection of ultimate meaning fade from view. On the one hand, since no worldly conventional activity can be definitive, the actual meanings of such notions as charity, morality, and patience are negated. On the other hand, since the bare statement that charity is not charity, or morality is not morality, easily fade into the nondescript hues of empty nothingness, it must be remembered that emptiness is the world of dependently co-arising being, that true suchness and emptiness occur only in the context of dependent co-arising. Ultimate meaning can become manifest only within a totally worldly and con-

ventional context. The passage from worldly convention to ultimate meaning is ascendent in its total negation of selfhood and aims at perfection by going ever higher and higher. In the same way, ultimate meaning cannot achieve its perfection as ultimately meaningful without manifesting itself in a descent to the lowest levels. True ultimate meaning does not consist in differentiating itself from conventional realities and resting in some superior, detached state. Just as worldly convention constantly ascends toward the realm of ultimate meaning in negating itself, so does ultimate meaning always descend into conventional discourse through self-negation. More accurately, while the two truths are interrelated and seek the same center, the tension between them is constantly reenacted in self-negation and self-estrangement and is therefore in need of constant renewal.

On the one hand, ultimate meaning must be immanent in worldly convention; on the other, as merely immanent it is not truly ultimate, but needs to be projected beyond worldly convention and transcend it. Worldly convention cannot encompass ultimate meaning and any ultimate meaning caught in the nets of worldly convention ceases to be ultimately meaningful. Ultimate meaning can only occur as something beyond the pale of language and worldly convention, whose borderlines in any case can never be delineated. The limits of language and worldly convention are forever receding further and further. (From the perspective of ultimate meaning, that very recession is also an inward progression toward worldly convention.) The fragmentation, opposition, and contradiction that mark the realm of worldly convention are not absolute. The only true and absolute dichotomous contradiction, which can never be resolved, is between worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Within the frame of worldly convention whatever cannot yet be unified is still open to the logic of some higher, unifying synthesis. Indeed the basic character of worldly convention consists in positing ever more inclusive syntheses of self-identity through logical discourse. But any synthesis brought about by worldly convention in the guise of an ultimate meaning achieved through the principle of self-identity, is the result of a clouding over and occluding of truth. True contradiction and opposition is simply "silence." Silence itself is not unity; on the contrary, it shows that no unity is possible. But neither is silence disunity. The verbal quiescence of ultimate meaning, just as it is, leaves room for countless worldly, conventional discourses, which do not on that account cease to be worldly and conventional. Thus, the two truths, as well as the world in which they are in tension as both self-estrangement and self-restoration, are renewed in the constant interplay between ultimate meaning and worldly convention.

On the Character of the Path: No Continuous Road Map to Awakening

In the approach taken above to the relationship between the two truths, their centripetal attraction has generally been conceived in terms of stages along a continuous, graded path of practice. Such teachings as the bodhisattva path with its thirty-seven factors of awakening, ten stations, ten practices, ten transferences, ten stages, and so on, were all developed in this context. But even the stages on the path of practice do not simply represent an unbroken continuity; they are also discontinuous. Continuity is usually taken in a temporal sense, but in the case of the ascending orientation of the path, we often imagine some broad, spatial continuity and thus come to speak also of worldly convention and ultimate meaning as two "realms." When we talk about the passage "from worldly convention to ultimate meaning," we imagine a spatially higher realm of ultimate meaning lying is some temporal future, with the "path" representing a way into that realm. The path offers a tentative promise that one can finally realize awakening through an unbroken chain of achievements. It would make no sense to called it a path unless it were continuous. This ascending "path of practice" finds its mirror image in the descending "path of skillful methods" that leads from Buddha to ordinary human beings, and this descending path is also envisaged in terms of a continuity that brings worldly convention and ultimate meaning together.

Above all else, ultimate meaning is silent and cut off from speech. But when we discussed its threefold character above, we found that it was not only articulated in terms of suchness and cessation, but that it was also explained as a conditioned path and skillful method, both of which are within the realm of language, within a context of "being in harmony with ultimate meaning." This means that there is a fully worldly and conventional aspect to ultimate meaning. In treating the threefold nature of worldly convention, we saw the opposite tendency in the approach of worldly convention to ultimate meaning. The third aspect of "worldly convention as manifestation" means that worldly convention encompasses within itself something of ultimate meaning and attempts to enunciate and express the fully perfected realm of that ultimate meaning in its own discourse. The two other meanings of worldly convention, as common sense naming and the functioning of apprehension and knowing, parallel the Vijñaptimātratā themes of the imagined and the other-dependent patterns of consciousness and present the core Mādhyamika meaning of worldly convention as a

clouded occlusion of truth. Thus, from both sides one can detect some connecting links between worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Worldly convention must ascend toward ultimate meaning, while ultimate meaning cannot express itself unless it descends to worldly, conventional discourse.

But such continuity can never be simply a matter of abstract stages. In the stages along the path, the two truths remain discontinuous and completely other. The path promises awakening at its end, but that is a tentative promise and not a preestablished guarantee. If it were the latter, no matter how far off in the future the awakening might be, the very idea of a pilgrimage would be rendered meaningless. The path is a process, a journey whose vicissitudes become clear only when one has arrived and looks back. In the passage from worldly convention to ultimate meaning, it is only after one has reached ultimate meaning that one becomes aware, in retrospect, that it was after all a single path.[2] From that ultimate state, the path is recognized as having been universal, the same for all, however straight or crooked it may have seemed in the walking. If the attainment of ultimate meaning were preestablished from the start, before the journey had begun, it would have to be understood as a foregone conclusion by virtue of its inner teleology. A journey, however, is a process of whose final destination one is not initially aware. If both the startng point and the destination were preestablished, identifiable realities and if the journey consisted only in traversing the interval, the path could be undertaken in an altogether worldly and conventional manner, and thus would itself be clouded and occluded. Since the journey would belong entirely to worldly convention, it could not involve a leap from worldly convention to ultimate meaning. Only a path that is dark and empty in both its beginning and its end,[3] in its starting point and in its destination, only a path that bespeaks a journeying,[4] can fulfill the requirements of a process that casts a bridge from initial conventional awareness to ultimate meaning.

The true path is the path that is originally not a path. The path that is a path is not the true path, since ultimate meaning is truly and ultimately meaningful only because all verbal, conditioned methods remain closed to it. The destiny of one following the path consists in knocking repeatedly at a door that remains eternally unopened, in waiting expectantly, even in despair, before that unopened door, in the pilgrimage of knocking again and again. If the contours of the path from worldly convention to ultimate meaning could be discerned in the underbrush,[5] or if it could be illumined in the darkness like the vision of a lighted roadway, it would be enough for people simply to follow its course. If the path followed a continuous route to the yonder

shore, no matter how much privation it might entail and no matter how long it might take, at some point it would reach its goal. But the fact is, the path is not shown to us. Whatever is shown cannot be the true path; the true path cannot be described or appreciated as a path at all. For that very reason and because all doors remain unopened and all paths misleading, the possibility arises that any conditioned teaching can carry meaning and value as a path, or at least, as "process only." Even though the door to ultimate meaning is permanently shut to conventional awareness, it can still present itself to us as "ultimate meaning for worldly convention." Ultimate meaning is always an ultimate meaning of conventional awareness; or it is not ultimate meaning. The fact that no path can be a path leading to ultimate meaning, the fact that the path remains "other" to absolutely ultimate meaning and consists in worldly, conventional, and conditioned occlusion, means that all dependently co-arising, conditioned beings directly communicate with ultimate meaning in terms of the path.

Thus, the gradations of the path described as the fifty-two bodhisattva stages are actually an abstraction. If the fifty-two stages formed a progressive continuum from ordinary life to awakening, they could not truly be the path. Stages only belong to the path when one maintains an awareness of the absolute otherness of ultimate meaning at each stage, only when one is aware that the path leads nowhere. Worldly and conventional teachings belong to the path only when at each instant of each particular "stage" they stand opposed to an absolutely other ultimate meaning and thus effect a harmony between worldly convention and ultimate meaning. This harmony consists in the conscious realization that selfhood is never ultimately meaningful and in no sense linked to ultimate meaning. Only the fool who lacks insight into the absolute otherness separating worldly convention from ultimate meaning can conceive of an abstract path of steady progress. The stages that mark the path start to finish are not continuous with the stage of awakening. They are not a spiritual thermometer, marking a steady advance. They do not chart any comprehensive course to attainment. At each moment and each stage, worldly convention and ultimate meaning are completely other. Anyone can understand that an ascent from the first stage to the second, or from the second to the third, implies the progression of given units, or a leaping over of distinct intervals. But, even within a single stage, the continuity of instantaneous arising and passing away at every moment is faced with an absolute otherness. So, too, the transition from moment to moment in the gradation of the path confronts the otherness of absolutely ultimate meaning. One is able to contact absolutely ultimate meaning precisely because its otherness negates all

stages. Each moment of each stage is horizontally succeeded by another higher moment and at the same time brings one into vertical contact with absolute ultimate meaning. Hence, one can attain awakening at any stage. Even the first stage can become the stage of awakening, and even at the buddha stage awakening must still remain attainable. Without vertical contact, there would be no progression from the first stage to the second, from the second to the third, and so on. The bodhisattva path is direct insight into the absolute otherness of ultimate meaning, at each instant facing the absolute beyond time—instantaneous and unmediated—now spread out over space and time and established in graded stages. Absolute otherness is present at each instant in each stage, but the abstract outlining of graded stages has nothing to do with ultimate meaning at all. When one is on the path, one does not even know whether it leads to ultimate meaning or to hell. This very ambiguity brings out the meaning of the path. There is no need for a fixed prescription to engender the path.

Even though it is an abstraction, the idea of the bodhisattva path as "process only" from worldly convention to ultimate meaning is not to be negated. The presentation of the great path of practice that brings about awakening, leading from worldly convention to ultimate meaning, cannot simply be negated. Nevertheless, no exact sequence of cause and result can be determined in terms of a progress from the path's beginning to its end, because, as essenceless and empty, it is "only a path." Since causes and results are "only dependently co-arisen and only other-dependent," they are established through the negation of essence. Given the relationship of absolute otherness that obtains between the two truths, the path can be established only in the context of the identity between emptiness and dependent co-arising.

The Yogācāra Interpretation of the Skillful Method for Entering the Unmarked and Their Presentation of the Fourfold Truth and Convention: The Danger of Losing Sight of the Discontinuity Between the Two Truths

The Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra thinkers were deeply involved in the path, as their abundant literature on yogic practices attests. But, even in such practices, the path must be a no-path of absolute otherness. In treating "the skillful method for entering the unmarked," such texts as *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* (1.6), present the famous Yogācāra thematization of the one, supreme path as moving

from the idea that "objects do not exist, only conscious construction exists," through the insight that "conscious construction does not exist either," to the entrance into unmarked truth.

An acute debate arose between the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools on the question of being and non-being, more specifically on whether or not the insight that "objects do not exist, only conscious construction exists," implies that only external objects (phenomenal things) as worldly conventions are nonexistent, while conscious construction can exist (subjectivity) in some ultimately meaningful fashion. The issue was not a matter of peripheral concern; it touched on the basic position of the two schools. The details of the debate cannot be treated here, but from the Mādhyamika standpoint, the entrance into the unmarked can only signify the passage from the world of conventional being, where objects do exist, to the realm of ultimately meaningful emptiness, where conscious construction does not exist. This means that no graded passage can be established. Ultimate meaning, as absolute other, is not accessible. When conventional awareness speaks of "entering the unmarked," it is referring to a skillful method, not to the common sense understanding of the metaphor of the path.

Even in Vijñaptimātra thought, "entering the unmarked" must be characterized as a skillful method. Likewise in the context of the three patterns of consciousness (the imagined, the other-dependent, and the perfected), the other-dependent functions as a skillful method in playing the role of mediating among them. The other-dependent pattern of consciousness accounts not only for the defiled evolutions of consciousness into illusion, but also for the establishment of teachings as discernible "marks," as skillful methods for entering the unmarked. Thus, it is completely impossible to enter the realm of ultimately meaningful emptiness lacking in all essence through the idea that "only the defiled evolutions of consciousness exist" or any similar notion of being. The being of the evolutions of consciousness is grounded only in consciousness; the being of the birth-death cycle itself is endless and without any prospect of liberation. If one were to envisage an ontology wherein only the being of consciousness exists and external objects do not exist—a world of non-existent objects based on the being of existent consciousness—how would it be possible to progress to a deconstruction of that ontology? How could one ever arrive at a system of non-being in a self-negation where conscious construction is also nonexistent? If the claim that "objects do not exist, only conscious construction exists" is true, then the claim that "conscious construction also does not exist" cannot be true.

The notion of the evolutions of consciousness provides a principle for explaining the structure of the world of being. It reduces the world

of actual being to the "being" of conscious construction, thereby identifying the being of conscious construction as the support (*āśraya*) for the being of beings. But how can one derive the notion that "conscious construction also does not exist" from a theory of consciousness according to which mental "seed impressions" engender their own appearances in an uninterrupted series, wherein each appearance in turn impresses the mind with new seeds in an ongoing process of interdependence? On a systematic understanding of being, the insight that the evolutions of consciousness do not exist represents a complete reversal. One can affirm that "conscious construction does not exist either" only if one understands the structure of the defiled evolutions of consciousness as other-dependent, that is, as falling within the framework of the three patterns. If this teaching on the three patterns (centered on the other-dependent pattern) is not presented as a basis for the explanation of the evolutions of consciousness, there is no way to arrive at the affirmation that conscious construction does not exist. The passage from the being of conscious construction to the non-being of conscious construction is possible only because the three patterns imply a shifting to the three nonpatterns, that is, to an insight into the emptiness of dependent co-arising. As noted above, this is so because the other-dependent pattern entails the path and plays a mediating role among the three patterns as the skillful method for entering the unmarked. There is a parallel here to the Mādhyamika notion of a passage from worldly convention to ultimate meaning, which is why one can maintain that the two truths embody the meaning of the path as the identification of mediation and alienation.

The tendency to regard the skillful method of entering the unmarked simply as a graded progression and to lose sight of the abyss of absolute otherness is particularly characteristic of those Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra thinkers who held that "only conscious construction as being exists." More concretely, Ch'i, the Chinese systematizer of the Fa-hsiang school, explained the two truths by means of "the fourfold convention and the fourfold ultimate."[6] According to this theory, both worldly convention and ultimate meaning can be analyzed by employing the four categories of the world, reasoning, realization, and ultimate meaning. In the case of worldly convention, these four are glossed respectively to mean naming, phenomenal being, shallowness, and explanation. In the case of ultimate meaning, they are glossed as phenomenal being, truth, depth, and pointing.

The initial category of "worldly worldly convention"—that which is named although it has no reality—is nothing more than the imposition of provisional names. By contrast, the second category of "reasoned

worldly convention" takes a position a step higher, for it describes being through a differentiation of phenomena. Having progressed through the third "realized worldly convention," one finally arrives at the fourth position of "ultimately meaningful worldly convention." This continuous progression within worldly convention from "worldly worldly convention" to "ultimately meaningful worldly convention" rests on the aforementioned distinction between worldly convention as true and false and in that context attempts to discern a process whereby utimate meaning is elicited from worldly convention.

In contrast to "worldly worldly convention," ultimate meaning is "worldly ultimate meaning." Note that this first category of ultimate meaning is present in worldly convention and corresponds to its second category of "reasoned worldly convention." But, even though it is the truth of ultimate meaning, the fourth category of "ultimately meaningful ultimate meaning" comes about in unbroken continuity from that first "worldly worldly convention" through both "reasoned ultimate meaning" and "realized ultimate meaning." It is only this final "ultimately meaningful ultimate meaning" that constitutes the sphere of "deconstructive (i.e., non-explanatory) word-pointing," the unmarked and unaffirmed that stands in opposition to all affirmations of being. Since the second convention of "reasoned worldly convention" is identical with the first ultimate of "worldly ultimate meaning" and the fourth convention of "ultimately meaningful worldly convention" corresponds to the third ultimate of "realized ultimate meaning," in this theory of a fourfold convention and a fourfold ultimate, only the very first "worldly worldly convention" is exclusively worldly convention and only the last "ultimately meaningful ultimate meaning" is exclusively ultimate meaning. A chart may help to clarify these relationships (Taken from Fukaura Masafumi, *Yuishikiron kaisetsu*, vol. 2, p. 79).

1. Non-Being: only "worldly worldly convention"
2. Being:
   a) Phenomenal being: "reasoned worldly convention" = "worldly ultimate meaning"
   b) Truth:
      1) Shallow: "realized worldly convention" = "reasoned ultimate meaning"
      2) Deep: "ultimately meaningful worldly convention" = "realized ultimate meaning"
3. Word Pointing: only "ultimately meaningful ultimate meaning"

This presentation of the four conventions and truths elicits admiration for the clarity with which it organizes the relationships between the two truths. At the same time, its diagramatic structure displays a pronounced tendency toward abstraction. The continuity and interpenetration that obtains between the two truths comes to the fore because the second convention is identified with the first ultimate, but, because there is a still higher grade of worldly convention, this ultimate does not really merit the name of truth or ultimate meaning. In other words, what we have here is simply a schematic arrangement of the gradations within both worldly convention and ultimate meaning. Since the lower grades of ultimate meaning are identical with the higher grades of worldly convention, there is not in fact much to choose from between the two truths, and their formulation in any case is extremely vague. The absolute otherness between worldly convention and ultimate meaning has been lost. The four ultimate meanings do no more than propose gradations, as do the four worldly conventions, and thus the difference between worldly convention and ultimate meaning is also reduced to a matter of degree. It is only when we reach the last item, ultimate meaning as a deconstructive word-pointing, that the differentiation of ultimate meaning as lying beyond interpretation, affirmation, or description emerges in some small measure. The otherness of the two truths from one another is important only at this point; the previous four conventions and three ultimate meanings, however many distinctions may be drawn, fail to address the basic issues. Only the fourth ultimate is ultimate meaning as completely other. Only the first convention is purely worldly convention. The meaning of the complete otherness of the two truths is taken into consideration only at the two extremes. If one sees the intervening three conventions and ultimates as linking together even those extremes in a continuous gradation, then the entire analysis becomes not only unprofitable but positively harmful.

Chapter 7

The Recovery of Worldly Convention From Emptiness

The Recovery of Worldly Convention From Ultimate Meaning: The Attraction of the Estranged

As explained above, while worldly convention and ultimate meaning have a centripetal aspect, they are also completely separate and centrifugal. In self-alienation their centripetal movement becomes centrifugal; mediated by their basic shift what is taken to be worldly and conventional or to be ultimately meaningful comes into contrast with renewed realms of worldly convention and ultimate meaning. There is a parallel here to the Vijñaptimātra theme of the mediating role of other-dependent consciousness, which we touched on briefly above. In such texts as *The Summary of the Great Vehicle*, the other-dependent pattern is regarded as the ground and mediation of both the imagined and the full perfected patterns of consciousness (or for all three patterns in the case of the recovery of originally present other-dependence), and as such represents the foundation for the being of beings.[1] The conversion of the three patterns into the three non-patterns is entailed by the central role of other-dependence in the structure of the three patterns. In Mādhyamika, the role of this threefold structure and the consequent mediating function of other-dependent consciousness is expressed in the teaching of the two truths. In Vijñaptimātra thought the other-dependent pattern itself constitutes the dependently co-arising world (in Mādhyamika terms, the world of "dependent co-arising only"), and the two truth theme locates the being of the dependently co-arising world in the context of the two truths.

As explained in chapter one, the theme of the two truths cuts directly across the theme of dependent co-arising and emptiness. Where the other-dependent pattern in Vijñaptimātra thought represents the totality of other-dependent arising as other-dependent, imagined, and

perfected, in Mādhyamika thought the theme of dependent co-arising embraces the polarity of the two truths with their dynamic of mutual attraction and self-alienation. Thus, the complete otherness that sets off worldly convention from ultimate meaning is delineated clearly in Mādhyamika, while in the case of Yogācāra the identification of dependent co-arising with the idea of the other-dependent pattern as the basis for both illusion and awakening makes it difficult to enunciate the otherness of ultimate meaning clearly. Insofar as it is impossible to confine ultimate meaning within dependent co-arising, the Yogācāra masters evolved their idea of two-directional other-dependence.

In Vijñaptimātra, the otherness of ultimate meaning consists in the relationship between the three patterns and the three nonpatterns, which together make up "the basic truth."[2] The Mādhyamika thinkers shift the focus. In their structure of the two truths, they were always concerned with maintaining the ineffability and inconceivability of ultimate meaning as transcendent, while insuring that societal conventions, as products of culture, are given a logical and verbal formulation that relates them to the world. Clearly the Mādhyamika doctrine of the two truths as the basic mediation of truth differs from the Yogācāra notion of other-dependence as the basic locus of dependent co-arising. In Mādhyamika, the two truths include other-dependence and dependent co-arising and lay foundations for a world in which dependent co-arising is identical with emptiness and emptiness with dependent co-arising. This becomes particularly clear when the two truths are treated in relation to the path. Because conventional discourse if falsifiable and devoid of all existing essence, worldly convention itself is empty. Accordingly, any ultimate meaning articulated in such discourse is empty.

The opposite also holds. In the structure of the two truths emptiness is identical with dependent co-arising and is therefore embodied within the conditioned, changeable world of dependent co-arising. Without the two truths, the Buddha would not have been able to speak of the ultimate meaning of emptiness, for the simple reason that it would have had no place in the verbal and logical discourse of the world. In all of this, the two truths bespeak a world in which emptiness is identified with dependent co-arising and co-arising with emptiness. At the same time, it should be remembered that dependent co-arising and emptiness refer to one and the same world, and that their identification can only be validated within the world. This, in turn, results from the fact that what is seen (both for the wisdom of the sage and for the common understanding of worldlings) as the absolute otherness of worldly convention and ultimate meaning, is united as being (worldly convention) and non-being (ultimate meaning). In spite of the constant identity of

dependent co-arising and emptiness, the two truths of worldly convention and ultimate meaning take their constant and absolute otherness as their first principle and characteristic feature.

In the Yogācāra lineage from Dharmapāla to Ch'i, true ultimate meaning is presented as a "deconstructive word-pointing." In contrast to conventional discourse, which is described as "ontological" (*abhidhāna*), this most simple act of "pointing" is a rejection of verbal explanations, and cannot itself be expressed in words. In a similar vein, the term "belief" (*mata*) is used to denote something inexplainable. This was what Kāśyapa experienced in a direct mind-to-mind communication as he smiled when the Buddha raised a flower in his hand. The original Sanskrit behind the Chinese term "pointing" *chih* (旨) can no longer be established, but it was probably something like *mata* (belief), or *abhiprāya* (intimation). The Chinese usage, especially in the phrase "word-pointing," has a positive ring and indicates some kind of an intended target. In its Indian context, pointing is referred to as "silence" (*tūṣṇīṃ-bhāva*), since in the final analysis ultimate meaning is neither itself phenomenal nor a principle behind the phenomenal. It is neither ontology nor pointing, but an absolute quiescence and cessation that can only be described as an emptiness, resisting all description or definition.

Silence is a negative expression, and there is nothing more negative than absolute silence. Confronted with the silence and emptiness of ultimate meaning in Buddhism, people cannot but feel estranged and bewildered. But this negativity is not necessarily lacking in positive content. Once silence had definitively laid to rest all ideas of being as experienced in the world, the contents of all those ideas are resurrected in their absolutely ultimate meaning. It is a restoration of worldly convention that brings to consummation the content of all conventional, co-arising discourse. As in *The Scripture of Vimalakīrti*, silence is not a simple absence of sound; it resounds like thunder.

In emphasizing this resurrection and restoration of worldly convention, the Vijñaptimātra masters focused on the affirmative aspect of the other-dependent pattern of consciousness. In the chapter "On Characteristics" in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, the term "the being of non-being" (*abhāvasya bhāvaḥ*) is contrasted with emptiness (1.12). It is true, as we have mentioned, that the Mādhyamikans criticized the notion of the being of other-dependent consciousness in which non-being is articulated in terms of being, yet both in the scriptures and in the writings of Candrakīrti, silence is termed *tūṣṇīṃ-bhāva*, the being (*bhāva*) of silence, and not simply *tūṣṇīṃ*, silence. Because emptiness is characterized as the ultimate meaning of dependent co-

arising, dependent co-arising is identified with emptiness; but this does not mean that emptiness is the nothingness of dependent co-arising, a purely silent, empty nothingness, a nihilistic, contentless absence of being. It is rather reality (*dharmatā*) contrasted with the realities of the world (*dharma*). It is suchness, the true being of the myriad beings that make up the world.

The Character, Use, and Content of Emptiness: The Structure of the Middle Path

In chapter twenty-four of his *Stanzas on the Middle*, "An Examination of the Four Noble Truths" (7ff), Nāgārjuna takes up the character, use, and content of emptiness. The ignorant people who lack understanding in these three areas are deeply confused about emptiness, are injured by emptiness and strike back at it. By seeing emptiness as either non-being or being, they try to refute and belittle the notion. The reason people are threatened by emptiness and find it injurious is that they fail to understand it, much the same as an inept snake charmer is liable to be bitten by his snake. When they try to explain it, their tongues are branded by its searing fire. For one who understands the character, use, and content of emptiness, this does not happen.

What then are its character, use, and content? Candrakīrti offers the following commentary:

> In the first place, the use (*prayojana*) of emptiness consists in the eradication of fabrication. As verse five of the eighteenth chapter of *The Stanzas on the Middle* states: "Liberation takes place as the eradication of activity and passion, which arise from discrimination. This [discrimination] arises from fabrication. It is fabrication that is eradicated through emptiness."
>
> karma-kleśa kṣayān mokṣaḥ karma-kleśā vikalpataḥ/
> te prapañcāt prapañcas tu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate//18.5//

The root of the word *prayojana*, use, has a number of connotations, which include "undertaking" and "employment," as well as the "purpose" for which something is used, or a "need" or "objective" that must be attained. The Tibetan translation of *prayojana* as *dgos-pa*, "that which is necessary," follows this latter connotation. Furthermore, since every "purpose" becomes a motive or cause, Kumārajīva translates it as "cause" (*yin-yüan* 因緣). The eradication and refutation of fabrication

in emptiness brings all these meanings together as the "function" of emptiness. If emptiness were no more than a complete nothingness, it would have no use or purpose, and one could not speak of it "causing" anything. But the function of emptiness—its cause and purpose—is the eradication of fabrication and the realization of quiescence, not a jettisoning of the being of beings. If emptiness were a nothingness pure and simple, it could not eradicate fabrication, and one who held to such a view would end up more tangled than ever in the nets of fabrication. The "character" of emptiness is the state in which such fabrication has been eradicated.[3] The verse from *The Stanzas on the Middle* that occasioned Candrakīrti's commentary quoted above states:

> Not known through another, that which is quiescent is unfabricated by fabrication. That which is not discriminated, which is undifferentiated, is the character of reality (18-19).

This is no difference from "the character of ultimate meaning," cited above (18.9), inasmuch as the character of both ultimately meaningful reality and emptiness are identical. Emptiness, in both its character and its use, is centered on the eradication of fabrication.

The third meaning of emptiness as content (*artha*) signifies that even after fabrication has been eradicated, emptiness is not merely a silence without content. As to the content of emptiness, Candrakīrti quotes the famous three-truth verse, to which we have often referred:

> I declare that which dependently co-arises to be emptiness. It [emptiness] is a descriptive designation having recourse [to dependent co-arising], and is the middle path (24.18).

Moving beyond the quiescence in which fabrication is eradicated, the content of emptiness is seen to be dependent co-arising. Inasmuch as emptiness is identical with dependent co-arising, it is a "descriptive designation having recourse [to dependent co-arising]." This phrase not only denotes dependent co-arising, but also entails an articulated and reengaged abiding in dependent co-arising. Quiescent emptiness descends into the realm of language, ideals, and reason, grounds itself on the concrete material support of worldly convention, takes recourse therein, and employs "descriptive designations" for its expressions. Just as, when one is learning to swim one has first to enter the water and then rely on the water for swimming, so emptiness must rely on verbal dscription as an existing material support (*upādāna*). This reliance and grounding

(*upādāya*), expressed in the verse as "taking recourse," corresponds to the term "dependent" in dependent co-arising. Given the identity of dependent co-arising and emptiness, the content of emptiness can only be dependent co-arising, as understood through the identity between emptiness and dependent co-arising.

This is not the one-dimensional dependent co-arising of the birth-death cycle prior to the total negation and refutation of its essential being. Because it is the content of emptiness, it is a dependent co-arising in which emptiness is realized. It is worldly convention understood in terms of a reengagement of wisdom in the world. Worldly convention is defined both as clouded occlusion and as arising. On the one hand, it arises simply in virtue of the occlusion of primal ignorance; on the other, it is basically an insight into emptines that arises within language as an awareness of the transience of things. The conventional, co-arising world comes to be and passes away in just the same way that Tathāgatās come into the world and depart from it in suchness. From the perspective of emptiness, the realization of emptiness is not found in reducing things to empty nothingness, but in the being of beings as originally empty. In other words, emptiness is realized only within the context of dependently co-arising being. Emptiness does not mean that there is simply nothing. On the contrary, its content pervades the entire universe. It *is* the transient and differentiated world in all its manifold being. Still, worldly convention remains throughout the clouded occlusion of primal ignorance, because it can never itself be the realization of awakening. This very realm of occluded worldly convention constitutes the content of emptiness.

Many criticisms may be raised against this way of understanding the reengagement of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the world. It may be argued that it involves them in the occlusion of primal ignorance. In response, one may claim that reengagement immerses them in the arising of the conventional world, but certainly not in falsehood or delusion. In any case, we need to look more closely at what reengagement in the world actually means.

The reengagement of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the world is ultimate meaning revealing itself by means of the worldly and the conventional. The employment of worldly convention does not imply that a buddha remains securely within the context of ultimate meaning, stretching forth a hand toward the conventional world without so much as taking a single step outside of that context. If we consider the non-abiding in cessation of the bodhisattva in terms of reengagement, the sense is clearly that a buddha does leave the realm of cessation to take up his abode in the conventional world of the birth-death cycle together

with deluded sentient beings, and does not in the slightest remain in the realm of cessation. Moreover, the bodhisattva is not limited to a bodhisattva body, but may appear in a human body among humans, a divine body among gods, or a demon body among demons, for such is the great compassion of a bodhisattva.

The Middle Path in Vijñaptimātratā: The Being of Non-Being

The invocational stanza of *The Stanzas on the Middle* praises the Buddha "who has taught dependent co-arising." The dependent co-arising referred to here is the content of emptiness. Let us now compare the Mādhyamika understanding of the middle path with the passage about "the being of non-being" from the chapter "On Characteristics" of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes.* We read there:

> Unreal imagining exists, but in it the two do not exist. However, herein emptiness exists, and in it that [unreal imagining] exists.
>
> abhūta-parikalpo'sti dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate/
> śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate//(1.1)//

The phrase "unreal imagining" refers to the appearance of dependently co-arisen things in consciousness. There "the two"—namely, subject and object—have no final status as existent beings. Rather, as expressed in the third phrase, "emptiness exists" in unreal imagining because no subjective or objective essence can lay any claim to being. It is in the context of the emptiness of subject and object that the dependently co-arisen state of "that [unreal imagining] exists."

Liberation and cessation do not exist as actual realities in this world. Rather, things of this world exist as unreal imagining in their emptiness. Even the reengagement of buddhas and bodhisattvas is an activity within the realm of this unreal imagining. The active reengagement of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the world is an involvement in the conceivable realm; the inconceivable is simply the realm of completely other ultimate meaning.[4]

The process described in *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* moves from unreal imagining to the nonexistence of duality (the existence of emptiness), and from there to the existence of unreal imagining in the context of emptiness. At first, it seems directly to

parallel the verse on the threefold truth from *The Stanzas on the Middle* with its progression from dependent co-arising to emptiness to reliance upon descriptive designations. But in the next verse, *The Analysis* suddenly shifts standpoints.

> Therefore it is taught that all things are neither empty nor not empty.
> It is because there is being and non-being and being, that there is the middle path.
>
> na śūnyaṃ nāpi caśūnyaṃ tasmāt sarvaṃ vidhīyate/
> sattvād asattvāt sattvāc ca madhyamā pratipsac ca sā// (1.2)//

Like the threefold truth verse from *The Stanzas on the Middle*, this verse concludes with an affirmation of the middle path. But the reason given for the middle path is that all things are neither empty nor not empty, that there is both being and non-being. By "all things" is meant not only conditioned and dependently co-arising things but also unconditioned emptiness. All things are said to be not empty because the being of empty dependent co-arising exists; at the same time, they are not not empty because emptiness empties them of all subjective-objective entities. Hence, the second half of the verse follows a sequence from existence to nonexistence to existence, as one passes from the being of unreal imagining, to the non-being of duality, to the being of unreal imagining in the context of emptiness. This is what is meant by the middle path.

In his prose commentary to this verse of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes*, Vasubandhu interprets the final "being" of the sequence, "being, non-being, being," to mean that "emptiness exists within unreal imagining and unreal imagining exists within emptiness." This is in fact the import of the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising, and leads one to conclude that the Vijñaptimātra interpretation of emptiness does not basically differ from the Mādhyamika one.

There is no doubt that when the Yogācārins drew this Mādhyamika conclusion, they were focusing on emptiness as a signifier of "the non-being of duality" and thus did not pay sufficient attention to the idea that dependent co-arising has its being within emptiness. They stressed the transcendent path in the skillful method of entering unmarked transcendence, basing themselves upon the non-being of duality, but their logical grounds for any subsequent reengagement in conventional rationality remains weak.

In the Vijñaptimātra passage, the second term in the progression from being to non-being to being, namely, "non-being," refers to the

non-being of the subject-object duality and corresponds to a skillful method of entering the unmarked in which both objective content and subjective consciousness are nonexistent. Non-being in this sense is not entirely synonymous with emptiness, which is located in the third item "being" and therefore remains aligned with the "non-being" of the first unreal imagining. The Mādhyamika understanding of emptiness as the identification of emptiness and dependent co-arising appears only at this third item of being. In a Mādhyamika understanding, the second item in the sequence would not be non-being but emptiness, since—as we saw in the threefold truth verse cited earlier—dependent co-arising (= being) is identical with emptiness (= non-being). In contrast to this Vijñaptimātra treatment where "being" as the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising first appears in the third step of "being", in Mādhyamika the dependent co-arising of the first "being" is present throughout as a reengagement in and recourse to descriptive designations that have recourse to dependent co-arising. In the conclusion that "this is the middle path," both interpretations agree. In sum, while the threefold-truth verse from *The Stanzas* and the present verse from *The Analysis* exhibit the same sequence of "being, non-being, being," they differ in that the Mādhyamika version stresses the being of reengagement while the Vijñaptimātra interpretation stresses transcendence.

There is good reason to read the first and second verses of the chapter "On Characteristics" of *The Analysis of the Middle Path and Extremes* completely in a Mādhyamika manner. But if we follow the commentaries of Vasubandhu and Sthiramati, particularly when comparing the Vijñaptimātra sequence of being expressed under the theme of the skillful method of entering the unmarked, we are forced to admit that its focus is different. As explained above, the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra system revolves about the notion of reengagement,[5] yet the force of reason in its actual discourse is directed toward transcendence and proves weak in presenting the logical grounds for reengagement in conventional rationality.[6]

The Resurrection and Establishment of Worldly Convention: The Structure of Reengagement in the Conventional World of Being

Mādhyamika thinkers, at least in later times, centered their attentions on "the valid establishment (*vyavasthāpana*) of worldly convention" as the outflowing of reason from emptiness. They argued that the meaning of Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle*, as well as of his other

texts, is not exhausted by reading it simply as a set of transcendent refutations, but contains an awareness of the possibility of establishing a conventionally valid logic in a descendent dynamic of reengagement. This is why the structure of the two truths must be central to Mādhyamika thinking and why, they argued further, the establishment of worldly convention itself consists in a correct grasp of the two truths. This was the birth of Mādhyamika logic, a logic distinct from the "formal logic" that developed in the Vijñaptimātra school.

So far no attempt has been made to raise a question directly about the attitudinal differences between the Vijñaptimātra and Mādhyamika schools. This no doubt important question is a largely undeveloped area of research, demanding a broad understanding and sharp insight into the thought of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, of Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, and of Sthiramati and Dharmapāla. One would also have to be familiar with Digñāga and Dharmakīrti whose treatment of the relationships between logical worldly convention and ultimate meaning gave shape to an important school of Buddhist logic, consolidating and evolving Vijñaptimātra theory along new lines. In addition, one would have to find a standpoint from which to appreciate the critique that Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka leveled against this new school of logic. Our scope here is much more limited: to contrast the attitudes of Vijñaptimātra and Mādhyamika regarding the descendent reengagement from emptiness to dependent co-arising.

This passage from emptiness to dependent co-arising leaves behind the silence of inconceivable and ineffable ultimate meaning in order to reengage itself in the realm of reflective judgment and reasoned inquiry. It is an entry into the world of culture, history, and society. Therefore, even if there is something of the logic of refutation and falsification at work here, there is more to the Mādhyamika approach than simply a series of negations in virtue of ultimate meaning. It also entails that logical reason bring about worldly convention from the context of ultimate meaning. In other words, the logical reasoning of refutation as such must also itself be a reasoning grounded in worldly and conventional dependent co-arising.[7]

The doctrinal relationship between Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle* and Candrakīrti's *Introduction to the Middle* is not altogether clear. The Tibetan Lamaist tradition teaches that Nāgārjuna's text was an emergency measure of pure refutation aimed at combatting the erroneous view of the adherents of the Lesser Vehicle who took the dependently co-arising world to be a world of being. From start to finish it stressed that enlightenment consisted only of emptiness and ultimate meaning. In contrast, the Lamaist tradition reports, Candra-

kīrti's text developed a logical method for establishing conventional being consequent upon awakening to emptiness. This is why it is entitled an "Introduction to the Middle." As mentioned above, Jayānanda's *Commentary to the Introduction to the Middle* describes Candrakīrti as having gone a few steps beyond Nāgārjuna in the development of his teaching.[8]

Later Tibetan Mādhyamika masters like Tsong-kha-pa gave full credit to the contribution of Candrakīrti, but rejected Jayānanda's contention that there is no descendent orientation in Nāgārjuna himself. They argued not only that the establishment of worldly convention is present in Nāgārjuna, but that it is in fact the basic intent of all his thinking, which is clearly thematized in his *Stanzas* from chapter twenty-four to the end of the text at chapter twenty-seven.

The fact that there could be an opinion like Jayānanda's, even if held by no more than a minority, and that it is to be found in a commentary included in the Tripiṭaka, is enough to show a general tendency to read Nāgājuna's *Stanzas* as predominantly refutation. In the Chinese translation of the work, and for the San-lun school that based itself on that translation, the place of honor was accorded to the logic of refutation. This is evident in the San-lun notion that "the overthrowing of falsehood is itself the manifestation of truth." The commentaries of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti were totally unknown to this tradition and the San-lun idea of refutation leaves little room for the establishment of worldly convention, thus triggering the attempts of the Fa-hsiang school to do so.

Properly understood, however, refutation is not concerned solely with the negation of falsehood. It is a refutation of truth as well as falsehood. The truth manifested by way of refutation is not a truth that excludes falsehood, but belongs to the conventional realm where falsehood and truth alike rise and fall from moment to moment.

It seems to be the case that from the time of Candrakīrti on, the Mādhyamika thinkers, without ceasing to follow the lead of Nāgārjuna, were more aware of the need to establish worldly convention. That Jayānanda should have stressed this tendency in Candrakīrti in his *Commentary* is hardly to be wondered at.

Quite apart from the question of whether the emphasis on the establishment of conventional discourse was a development that took the thought of Nāgārjuna a step further, there is little doubt that the question was pushed into the foreground by the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātratā masters in their treatment of worldly convention. It is not hard to imagine that the question of concrete reengagement in the conventional world from a state completely beyond worldly convention must have

been a common concern within Buddhist circles of doctrinal reflection at the time.

In opposition to the Vijñaptimātra concern with a skillful method for entering the unmarked—an approach that at first sight looks to be deeply involved in worldly convention and to set up a continuous, ascendent path from the world to the realm of emptiness—the novelty of the interpretation that Candrakīrti and others offered of "establishing worldly convention" lies precisely in its suggestion that worldly convention can also be established in the opposite way: in a descent from emptiness to dependent co-arising, maintaining the complete otherness of the two truths in the form of "a continuity of discontinuity." On this reading, worldly convention is the concrete result of reengagement with the world.

To be sure, the establishment of worldly convention was a central concern to other Mādhyamika thinkers as well, among them Bhāvaviveka, whose Svatantrika attempt to construct an "independent reasoning procedure" to validate worldly convention probably was grounded in a desire to avoid negating worldly convention by totally transcending it. Here, too, refutation is not entirely negative but carries the positive sense of establishment.[9]

Chapter 8

Differentiation and Original Awakening

The Differentiation of the Two Truths: The Need for Otherness

At first glance, the idea of ultimate meaning expressed in terms of silence or emptiness is extremely negative. This does not mean that it lacks all content, even if its content, as ultimately meaningful, does not exist on its own in isolation. On the contrary, the ordinary realm of worldly convention itself comprises the entire content of ultimate meaning. "The content (*artha*) signified by the term 'dependently co-arising' is the content (*artha*) signified by the term 'emptiness' (ultimate meaning)."[1] The idea of identifying emptiness with dependent co-arising can be understood as a reengagement in the world and as a restoration and resurrection of worldly convention. But in focusing on the validity of worldly convention, we must do so in terms of the central structure of the two truths. For dependent co-arising to be identical with emptiness, the two truths must point to the same entire world from different perspectives.

Earlier, we described how the two truths mediate the identity of co-arising and emptiness. Suffice it here to note that the two truths are also the key factor in the reengagement wherein emptiness is seen as identical with dependent co-arising and ultimate meaning is manifested as valid worldly convention. In both the ascending and descending moments of their "identity," emptiness and dependent co-arising remain absolutely other, in virtue of their complementarity with the two truths. The location of the two truths as the central factor in "the establishment of worldly convention" defines a true understanding of the structural difference between ultimate meaning and worldly convention. That is to say, one understands the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising correctly by first differentiating the two truths clearly, bringing to the fore their absolute otherness relative to one another. Establishing their "identity" is not simply a matter of direct intuition. Even when

there is some kind of direct, contemplative wisdom at play, if there is not also an immediate and spontaneous differentiation therein between "being" as ultimate meaning and "beings" as worldly convention, it is not possible to speak of an identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising. At least some such differential reasoning is implied in the term "identity."

The need for a differentiation of the two truths is clear from the use of the term distinction (*vibhāga*) in their regard. For example, *The Stanzas on the Middle* (24.9) declares that "if one does not know the *distinction* between the two truths, one cannot attain the true meaning of the Buddha doctrine." By this is not meant a mere categorical differentiation of the two truths lined up side by side as entities. It points rather to a relationship of unmixed and absolute otherness within the structure of the two truths themselves.

Furthermore, the appearance in the commentaries of Candrakīrti, Bhāvaviveka, and others of such "differential" (*viśeṣaṇa*) terms like "as ultimately meaningful" (*paramārthatas*) or "essentially" (*svabhāvatas*) in the form of adverbial modifiers raise important syntactical questions. In the claim, "All beings do not arise from themselves," is the non-arising from self an "ultimately meaningful" non-arising? Here the question about how to interpret these "differential" modifiers does not directly concern the two truths, even though within the Mādhyamika circle with its central focus on the two truths there were arguments about how to understand the "differentiation" of the two truths correctly, arguments that became quite subtle. For our purposes, however, the thrust of the adverbial use of these differential modifiers (*viśeṣaṇa*) points to the sense of the term "distinction" (*vibhāga*) introduced above.

This distinction or differentiation of the two truths is implied in the fact that ultimate meaning, far from lacking content, positively embraces worldly convention as its content. Differentiation implies that there is no commingling of the two realms of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. Either as ascending worldly convention or as descending ultimate meaning, the two remain unmixed and absolutely other. In using the terms "ascending" or "descending," we sometimes tend to see only their continuous aspect and hence to conflate the two realms. In actuality, as the human realm is not mixed with the divine, so the divine realm is not mixed with the human. If the divine and the human were continuous, there could be no "identification" or "reengagement" that would equate emptiness with form or with dependent co-arising. To regard the divine as the basic principle of human society and culture, of all rational and conventional thinking, is to fall into a muddleheaded sacralism that fails to understand the difference between the two truths. Such assertions of continuity, whether viewed in ascen-

dent or descendent terms, fuses the two into a single truth and ends up affirming being as independent and essential. Any attempt to encompass the numinous realm of divine and ultimate truth, which is inconceivable, ineffable, and beyond logical reasoning, within a conventional thinking—be it scientific or philosophic, materialist or idealistic—amounts to asserting arrogantly the ultimacy of a worldly and conventional self.

Ultimate meaning is not thinking. It transcends all thinking, no matter how rationally elaborated. Ultimate meaning is transcendent to any understood content and to all the varieties of human acts of wisdom and understanding. Philosophies, with all their subtle ratiocinations, are the fruit of thinking and are ultimately meaningful only in worldly and conventional terms. True ultimate meaning surpasses philosophy and maintains silence. Whatever is grasped by conventional understanding as ultimate inevitably falls short of the ultimate itself and fails to make contact with it because of a dependence on worldly and conventional selfhood. Conversely, if ultimate meaning descends to join itself to worldly conventions, it becomes a religious assertion of selfhood. But it is impossible for the divine to meddle in worldly and conventional affairs. The silence of the divine is not reducible to sets of judgments about what is or is not; all its judgments belong rather to the pattern of neither/nor. This is not because it is unknowing or incapable of making judgments, but because ultimate meaning appears in the negation of judgmental perspectives. The ascription to religious awareness of pronouncements that this is so and that not so is not ultimate meaning, but merely worldly convention. Only by leaving the realm of ultimate meaning and applying the principles of worldly convention can one make such judgments. When worldly convention is examined from the perspective of ultimate meaning, the differentiation between the two must always be kept in mind.

At the same time, insofar as religious awareness is to be articulated in judgments, one must become reengaged in the world. Indeed, reengagement from ultimate meaning to worldly convention involves a separation from ultimate meaning and a delving into the realm of purely conventional discourse. But this does not issue in a series of religious pronouncements made by religious persons from within a religious perspective. By the very fact of rendering judgments one has ceased to act as a "religious" person and become purely conventional and secular. Religious judgments of this sort are incapable of stepping outside the scope of conventional, co-arising language. In fact, they are without essence not only as ultimate meaning, but also as worldly, conventional discourse. The essential and ultimate in religion is not mediated in the terms of conventional discourse and cannot be ad-

dressed in its terms. It is on this absolute otherness between the two truths that reengagement is established.

Because reengagement has already passed through the realm of ultimate meaning, "ultimate meaning becomes operative within worldly convention." But this does not mean that ultimate meaning itself functions in the latter realm. One cannot deduce a continuity from ultimate meaning to worldly convention from the phrase "within worldly convention." Reengagement is not the action of some divine principle within the conventional world. Even where such claims are made, insofar as divine action arises at one moment and pass away at another, it remains totally conventional and thus distinct from the absolute otherness of ultimate meaning. We use the term reengagement to characterize the lack of affinity or connection between ultimate meaning and worldly convention. Thus, the differentiation of the two truths provides the framework for a reengagement to occur and allows for "the establishment of worldly conventions."

It frequently happens, however, that even though the ascendent transcendence of ultimate meaning over worldly convention is acknowledged, a tendency remains to think of the descendent reengagement of ultimate meaning in worldly convention as a continuous process. But if this were so, the identity of withdrawal from the world into emptiness and returning to the dependently co-arising world would be forfeited. If there is discontinuity in ascent, it is impossible for there to be continuity in descent. Descendent reengagement is also fully discontinuous: no divine principle ever directly governs the conventional world, which functions only through conventional principles. Worldly convention is always and ever dependently co-arisen. Indeed, it is termed worldly convention precisely because it is completely other than ultimate meaning.

The tendency to discern a continuity in descendence seems to stem from the experience of conversion and renewal occasioned by ultimate meaning within the realm of worldly convention. We leave this question for later discussion in order to focus now on some ways in which the two truths are confused.

When the distinction between the two truths is not grasped clearly, they tend to fuse into one truth. Those blind or completely oblivious to the distinction between the two truths become prisoners of the conventional, which they regard as the only truth. This is the only world they know. All phenomena are seen as no more than the incessant flow of conventional and worldly affairs in and out of being. Only this flux is considered real, whether it be judged by materialistic conventions or regulated by religious conventions. In its fixation on the power of

money or the authority of a religious tradition, such a frame of mind is convinced that it can encompass all there is. There are some who give priority to the human over the divine, prompting a posture of *hubris* that aims at rendering the divine subservient. This is what happens when science sets itself up against religion and submits all problems to the scientific process for solution. There are others who harbor the pretence of having "tapped" into ultimate meaning by personal reflection, only to turn away from it in order to confine themselves to worldly conventions. Such persons, even though they have caught a glimpse of the existence of a realm of ultimate meaning, willfully shut their eyes and assume a posture of indifference. Despairing at the absolute otherness of ultimate meaning, they withdraw into conventional affairs, lose themselves in the pressures of work, and try to find what self-assurance they may within conventional patterns of "the good life." The idea that "only worldly convention exists" was employed above to point to dependent co-arising within a differential understanding of the two truths. There, however, it was not an assertion that worldly convention is the only truth.

Still another type of forgetfulness of the difference between the two truths is the exact opposite of the above. It has to do with religious persons who get stuck in the uniqueness of the truth of ultimate meaning by supposing ultimate meaning to govern worldly conventions. Such persons imagine a continuous divine principle ruling the world and see the conventional world as being gradually absorbed into ultimate meaning, that is, as transformed into an ultimately meaningful world through their religious activity. Such an overevaluation of ultimate meaning in opposition to worldly convention amounts to a religious assertion of selfhood. The belief that all conventional worldly existence will finally become religious and the world itself transformed into the millenium is grounded on the hope that something outside of this co-arising world will take it over and usher in a heavenly future.

Another way that people try to disassociate ultimate truth from worldly convention completely, even though they themselves belong to the world, is to detest all worldly and conventional activity out of a sense of personal self-satisfaction that takes the guise of final refuge in "my Lord Buddha." In India, ordinary men and women in the world were considered at the same time to be practitioners of the path. This is no doubt a result of particular cultural factors.[2] But in the Buddhism transmitted to the Far East, practice and absolute meaning became the exclusive possession of those who had abandoned the world to hide themselves in the mountains and forests, out of a sense of obligation to despise any further involvement in the conventional world. These

individuals clung to the solitary truth of ultimate meaning and acknowledged no value in the conventional world.

Such adherence to a single truth, whether worldly convention or ultimate meaning, makes any understanding of the distinction between the two truths impossible. The reason for describing worldly convention and ultimate meaning as unrelated and absolutely other is to avoid overemphasizing either. It is only as absolutely other and discontinuous that the truths can be seen as the identity of emptiness and co-arising in a centrifugal manner that is at the same time centripetal. When one is unclear about their differentiation, talk of the "identity" of emptiness and co-arising cannot but slip into a purely rational ontology biased in the direction of conventional thinking, or into an unmediated mysticism biased in the direction of ultimate meaning. It is only in trying to understand the differentiation between the two truths from an unbiased perspective that leans in neither direction that we can find a new meaning to the middle path.[3]

There are all too many examples, both in the past and in the present, of bias toward one or the other of the two truths. The military spirit is a case in point. Victory or defeat is seen simply as a function of material power. Columns of soldiers are seen as units of material power to be pitted against one another in battle. At the same time, and in stark contrast to this set of values, all material being is negated through the affirmation of a "divine" (*kamikaze*) military force at work in the world. When this set of contradictions is driven to extremes, people may become suspicious. In any case, both views exhibit a failure to appreciate the absolute otherness of the two truths one from the other: on the one hand, a pride in material possessions with no fear of God; on the other, a refuge in ultimate God with no regard for the human world, a devaluation of the conventional world and anything that is not ultimate meaning. Needless to say, neither position understands the true value of the secular or the truth of ultimate meaning, and in the confusion it is all too easy for the pendulum to swing from one extreme to the other.

The Return to What Is Originally Present: The Primal World of Dependent Co-arising

Differentiation of the two truths requires that the world of reengagement (the co-arising, conventional world apart from ultimate meaning) be seen as "that which is originally present," or "that which is already perfected." The establishment of worldly convention does

not mean that worldly convention is made to flow directly out of ultimate meaning or that it is constituted for the first time. The meaning of reengagement can only be expressed as a "return" to the dependently co-arising world that has been present from the beginning.

One passes from the one-dimensional, co-arising of the birth-death cycle to the world of emptiness, and from this realm of ultimate meaning returns once again to become reengaged in the conventional world. In this process, worldly convention takes on a new meaning that can only be described as a resurrection, a restoration, and a bringing to new life. Worldly convention achieves this renewal within the realm of ultimate meaning and takes on a higher new life whose reality cannot be ignored. Without such new life, worldly conventions could never be validated as true. Yet, the rationale for an "originally present" dependent co-arising as a world of reengagement is found in the fact that there cannot be a trace of continuity in this resurrection and restoration. Thus, dependent co-arising, as "that which is originally present," is the realm of reengagement from above.

The idea of reengagement implies the idea that worldly convention is born out of ultimate meaning. In this sense, it is proper to speak of it as an "outflow" from ultimate meaning. In his *Introduction to the Middle*, Candrakīrti likens reengagement to an image in a mirror: even though it is not itself the reality and is empty, it gives access to a knowledge of the real. Hence, he can state: "Being empty, all beings arise from emptiness" (6.38). *The Summary of the Great Vehicle* contains the well-known theme of the teaching being "the permeation of hearing which flows out from the ultimate Dharma Realm." There is some question as to whether this theme really describes reengagement in the world and the establishment of conventional truth, since it can be interpreted to imply a continuity from worldly convention to ultimate meaning. But the passage in Candrakīrti cited above clearly does describe reengagement. However, worldly convention is not then established for the first time as something new. If it were, there would be no way for worldly convention ever to restore and resurrect itself through reengagement with the world. Worldly convention is a resurrection of an originally present world.

It is easy to imagine a continuous line leading from ultimate meaning to reengagement in worldly convention, but any such continuity would have to be actually worldly and conventional. In this sense, too, conventional continuity is being-to-its-limit and conditioned being, not being-as-such. This means that being-to-its-limit is originally present. We can speak of reengagement because it involves a discontinuous progression from ultimate meaning. In this way, the originally present

world of co-arising can become the field for reengagement. This kind of "original presence" has the same meaning as the statement that "the willows are green and the flowers red." Nothing changes in the willows or flowers because of the presence or absence of an awareness of them. Willows do not become green just when someone attends to their greenness nor does that attention affect their color in the least. The appearance of "that which is originally present" within "the establishment of worldly convention" means that the conventional world continues just as it is, operating solely in terms of worldly and conventional principles. No continuity from ultimate meaning to worldly convention is implied, nor is there any reason for ultimate meaning to become an operative principle in the conventional world. If ultimate meaning were so to function, there would be no true reengagement and no way to identify abandoning the world and becoming involved with it once again. In other words, this identification is possible only because the co-arising world is that which is originally present.

Since reengagement, however, presupposes that one has already penetrated to the realm of ultimate meaning, that originally present and co-arising conventional world must be somehow transformed and elevated to a higher dimension. As explained above, the realm of reengagement cannot be the one-dimensional, co-arising world of the birth-death cycle, because worldly convention is radically other than ultimate meaning, passion is different from wisdom, and common worldlings are not bodhisattvas reengaging themselves in the world. But even if there is an elevation to a higher dimension, it is not a function of the effect of ultimate meaning upon the conventional world. Any notion of a higher dimension merely reflects our way of thinking and hence remains worldly and conventional. Ultimate meaning is not simply the unity of worldly diversity, because any such unity would necessarily be conceived in a conventional manner. A shift of dimensions takes place only on the plane of the conventional world and only through conventional principles. Conventional understanding does not attain to ultimate meaning by such a shift, nor does the attainment of ultimate meaning entail restoration on a higher dimension. If either of these were the case, worldly convention would, in the final analysis, be useless and there would be no positive value in "establishing worldly convention." It would be enough for conventional understanding merely to aim at being elevated to ultimate meaning and becoming fused into a single truth with ultimate meaning.

It may help to clarify this interpretation further by considering it in terms of the distinction between being-as-such and being-to-its-limits. The attainment of the reality of suchness by the conventional,

co-arising realm of being-to-to-its limits signifies a transformation of the latter into ultimate meaning as being-as-such. Being-to-its-limits refers to the total enclosure of all limits in time and space, to which nothing can be added. Thus, the transformation into ultimate meaning (being-as-such) adds nothing to being-to-its-limits, but validates and affirms it as being-to-its-limit. Far from being a negative expression, the term "as such" denotes ultimate meaning and points directly to reengagement. That is to say, suchness means being reengaged in the conventional world. Even the term Tathāgata (come as such) originally had this meaning. Being-to-its-limits is the originally present, co-arising, conventional world, but to say that its very existence, just as it is, is being-as-such implies the full restoration of worldly convention. Being-to-its-limits cannot be anything extrinsic to "what is originally present."

The practice of the path and its goal of a conversion of support (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) both belong to the conventional world. The supporting ground that is to be converted is simply the other-dependent pattern of consciousness; but even when converted, this other-dependent pattern does not represent a complete perfection that is not other-dependent. The originally present other-dependent pattern, even after conversion, cannot avoid being other-dependent. Texts like *The Summary of the Great Vehicle* teach that "defiled other-dependence is converted into purified other-dependence." Both defilement and purification are themselves other-dependently co-arisen. In short, other-dependence (dependent co-arising within consciousness) is the only ground on which to approach ultimate meaning and to become once more involved in the conventional world.

Initial Awakening and Original Awakening: An Interpretation in Terms of the Notion of the Originally Present World of Dependent Co-Arising

Since "that which is originally present" seems to be synonymous with the themes of "the originally pure mind" or "original awakening," it may seem surprising that it should exist in a dependently co-arisen realm of worldly convention. Initial enlightenment, becoming awakened for the first time, is set up in contrast to original enlightenment. But insofar as in awakening for the first time one becomes aware that awakening could never occur without an original awakening, initial awakening is itself an original awakening. The same sort of relationship that obtains between original and initial awakening must also be seen to exist in the form of originally present dependent co-arising. "Original purity," or "the originally pure mind," stands in contrast to mind that

has yet to be purified. But, because it is opposed to defilement, such purification is clearly conventional and dependently co-arisen, and can never be true ultimate meaning. The pure mind does not exist in the form of an ultimately meaningful essence; it is identical with the conversion of support and hence is conditioned and subject to change. One can speak about defilement and purification only in a context of reengagement in worldly convention and only through meanings that are themselves co-arisen. In his *Commentary on the Treatise in Four Hundred Verses* (360ff.), Candrakīrti explains:

> If all beings are essenceless and empty and there is nothing that exists, does this not amount to nihilism? It does not, for inasmuch as defilement and purification are causally related, their essences exist as dependently co-arisen.

Clearly he is referring to dependent co-arising as a reengagement from emptiness in which the dependent co-arising of conditioned and conventional essences exists and through which one is able to express validly the causal relationships between defilement and purification. There is no difficulty in attributing this meaning of "original" to the "originally pure mind" and "original awakening," provided one first affirms the identity of emptiness and co-arising.

It is because of the distinction between the two truths, which we have dealt with extensively in the foregoing, that the question of the valid establishment of worldly convention in reengagement arises. Yet the "originally present" ground upon which conventional discourse is established in reengagement is not to be identified with an ultimately meaningful "original state of awakening" (which would make it merely one more attempt to find continuity with ultimate meaning), but with dependent co-arising.

The originally pure mind or original awakening is often compared to the sky. The empty sky (*ākāśa*) is void because originally there is nothing in it; it is pure because it is not defiled by anything. But when the sky clears after having been "stained" by clouds or smoke, people say that "the sky has become clear and pure." The sky that was originally pure sky becomes pure once again. Now if "that which is originally present" is simply equated with an ultimately meaningful, original awakening, the worldly and conventional would be no more than clouds floating in an empty sky. They would be merely adventitious and there would be no need for them to be present at all. All historical and social action in the world would lack positive significance and concrete value. Moreover, any validation of the conventional world would be rendered

meaningless, reduced to the task of sweeping defilement away, or single-mindedly dissolving worldly convention by fusing it to ultimate meaning. In that case, one could not speak about ultimate meaning at all because, lacking any content, it would be inert and without the means to reveal itself.

Original awakening is better understood as "fundamental non-discriminative wisdom." Fundamental wisdom is referred to as "non-discriminative" here because its content is ultimately meaningful emptiness; and it is called "fundamental" to distinguish it from "subsequently attained, purified, worldly wisdom." In the validation of conventional discourse that occurs in reengagement, one passes from fundamental wisdom to subsequently attained wisdom, this latter being a purified *worldly* wisdom. Here, too, the fact of something being "originally present" does not prevent its being dependently co-arisen. Reengagement in subsequently attained wisdom represents the conversion to a purified, other-dependent pattern of consciousness. One of the main ideas of Vijñaptimātratā is that "the other-dependent pattern is not realized unless the fully-perfected pattern is realized." The theme parallels that of reengagement.

None of this implies any continuity between full perfection and other-dependence. In the structure of the three patterns, the other-dependent pattern returns to its other-dependence by way of insight into full-perfection. It is the same other-dependence before as after. In the Vijñaptimātra school, this final standpoint is called "conscious construction only." It is worth noting that even after having moved from an understanding of the non-being of external objects to the non-being of conscious construction itself, these Yogācāra thinkers still spoke of "conscious construction only" rather than of the emptiness of conscious construction. In other words, the images and ideas that are initially appropriated and constructed within the mind (*vijñapti*) as co-arising appearances, in their final restoration, become the suchness of reality as conscious construction only (*vijñapti-mātra*). Had it taught that conscious constructs are merely non-existent and empty, the Vijñaptimātra school would have been altogether commonplace and unoriginal. But its notion that even the final standpoint of "conscious construction only" remains a conscious activity is a profound and creative insight. This approach has close ties to the validation of worldly, conventional discourse by way of a reengagement in the world, a validation, however, that is difficult to draw merely from their treatment of the evolutions of (defiled) consciousness (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*).

Chapter 9

Worldly Convention as Being-Only

The Logical Progression to "Worldly Convention Only: The Structure of Reengagement in Worldly Convention

It is the dependently co-arising world that is originally present and it is in this world that reengagement takes place. The question then arises whether and how such reengagement differs from the entirely one-dimensional world of dependent co-arising. Does the wisdom affirmation, "the willows are green," mean the same thing when spoken by unenlightened people in the world? If so, there would be nothing problematic about the "establishment of worldly convention," since there would be no need for further expenditure of effort or logical reasoning to reestablish a dependently co-arising worldly convention that has already been established from the beginningless beginning.

But can we really regard the reengagement of buddhas and bodhisattvas—their non-abiding in cessation and non-rejection of the birth-death cycle—as enclosed within the primal world of the birth-death cycle? No, we cannot. The dependently co-arising realm of reengagement is most certainly not the one-dimensional birth-death cycle, but rather the realm of dependent co-arising to be identified with emptiness. Historical and social conventions exist in this realm, just as they are, so that we cannot describe it simply as empty. It is the world of dependent co-arising seen as that which is originally present. How precisely does reengagement in dependent co-arising differ from the simple birth-death cycle of transmigration?

The differentiation of ultimate meaning from worldly convention once again plays a pivotal role here and indeed discloses its true significance. This disclosure can only be the fruit of practice; there is no way to understand it adequately simply by analyzing the two truths as rational principles. The true significance of the two truths is not revealed in clear definitions or logical and objective explanations. If they are not

differentiated in practice, they are not differentiated at all.

At bottom, the two realms of ultimate meaning and worldly convention refer to the different modes of understanding of the saint and the common worldling. The actual world itself is not two but one, and therefore the two truth realms cannot be made so completely other as to refer to separate worlds of meaning. As explained above, the existing world *is* the one world of conventional, co-arising being. But, we are not limited to describing this world as worldly and conventional; it can also be seen as the realm of ultimate meaning. The one, all-inclusive world can be experienced as one and all-inclusive only in the dimension of practice and deed. Moreover, the world of practice cannot be rehearsed; vicarious experience and experimentation make no sense there. The world is forever reaching out to encompass all modes of being. In true practice, the whole of the world is brought into focus at a particular time and place. The differentiation of the two truths becomes manifest in just such a single, all-encompassing world of practice.

Action implies decision and decision implies the differentiation of the two truths in the background. If there were no differentiation and conventional truth were simply identical with ultimate meaning, no authentic action could ever be performed. One can, of course, make sense of the focusing of all worlds on a single point—that is, an all-inclusiveness of the one world—in terms of an identity between emptiness and dependent co-arising, but the world one would be left with would be completely static. Authentic practice must take place within a differential understanding of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. The dependent co-arising world, the world that is originally present and that becomes the field of both liberation and the birth-death cycle, always includes many types of unifying activity. Insofar as the co-arising realm of practice is identical with emptiness, the world is oriented toward ultimate meaning; insofar as it is grounded on originally present dependent co-arising, it is oriented toward worldly convention. One cannot engage in practice at all in a world unified as pure and ultimate meaningness. Authentic practice occurs in the historical and social activity of individuals conscious of being alienated from and completely other than what is ultimately meaningful. For as worldly and conventional, all action is conditioned and subject to change, but seen from ultimate meaning, all action is "no-action." In the realm of worldly convention the performance of any action by any individual always takes the form of "somebody going somewhere." For ultimate meaning that same very action—just as it is and because of the way it is—is empty with the essence-free relativity of dependent co-arising, and

is thus better described as "nobody going nowhere."

If we fail to differentiate ultimate meaning from worldly convention in the performance of concrete individuals, all their actions look either mechanical and routinized, or immobile and dead. In either case, the meaning of human action is trivialized and the establishment of worldly convention in reengagement is rendered impossible. Authentic human action cannot be either impulsive movement or static quietude. It does not come to a halt, not even for an instant, when it reaches some preestablished stage, but in the twinkling of an eye adapts itself to each occasion and every exigency. It is here that the silence of ultimate meaning resounds with the thunder of worldly convention.

If a buddha comes into the world, kill him. If a patriarch comes into the world, kill him. There should be not the slightest interval between the coming into the conventional world of ultimate meaning and its departure into quietude. But the goal is not simply the killing of buddhas and patriarchs, for, since negation is identified with affirmation, the bringing to life of demons and devils in the world is also a necessary part of the path. Worldly convention is established and one is able to affirm that the willows are green and the flowers red by letting life continue as conventional. Both speaker and speech are always worldly and conventional, and so is all religious practice. Because of its proleptic structure, this worldly convention, just as it is, is also ultimately meaningful suchness. Such insight requires both the radical differentiation of ultimate meaning from worldly convention and an engagement in the practice of that differentiation. It is only when this differentiation is put into practice and brought to speech that one ventures to say "the willows are green and the flowers red," words that can be mouthed by even common worldlings.

The description of the Bodhisattva Avalokitêśvara appearing in thirty-three transformation bodies suggests a similar differentiation in that the appearance of those transformations takes place in the conventional realm. If there was no more to it than a manifestation in the world, there would be no ultimately meaningful wisdom underlying the great compassion of Avalokitêśvara. The masterful manifestation of these bodies in accord with the needs of the world implies their differentiation from ultimate meaning, a differentiation that avoids overemphasizing either conventional presence or ultimate absence. Whereas emptiness is identified with dependent co-arising and becoming, ultimate meaning is completely other than and different from worldly convention. To stay within the bounds of ultimate meaning is to fail to understand ultimate meaning. Similarly, to stagnate in worldly convention is to abandon all opportunity to understand worldly convention.

Practice itself is the practice of differentiation. The field of practice is constructed on the two truths. Thus, the doctrine of the two truths aims at situating true and living practice.

As noted above (chapter four), dependent co-arising, as the field of reengagement, must be affirmed as "worldly convention only" (*saṃvṛti-mātra*). It is itself neither the truth of ultimate meaning nor the truth of worldly convention. When unenlightened persons cling to worldly convention as "truth," this truth is real only as the attachment of a clouded and occluded mind. Such a truth is bounded by the one-dimensional realm of dependent co-arising as the birth-death cycle, and is not a reengagement of ultimate meaning in the world. In contrast, the truth of ultimate meaning is the insight of holy wisdom into true suchness and cessation, which are not themselves the world of reengaged becoming. In the quiesence and immobility of ultimate meaning, there is no world-transcending and no world-reengagement, no cessation and no birth-death cycle. The restoration of worldly convention in reengagement cannot come about directly through such quietude. It must be dependently co-arisen.

I have introduced the terms "worldly convention only" and "dependent co-arising only" to show the nature of the dependent co-arising of reengagement. The term "only" does not mean that dependent co-arising is separate from ultimate meaning, something merely worldly and conventional. Worldly convention is always simply worldly convention in contrast to ultimate meaning, but this is not to say it can be divorced from ultimate meaning. Dependent co-arising is dependent co-arising only in being identified with emptiness. The term "only" in "worldly convention only" means that worldly convention is something different from the *truth* of worldly convention. Like the Vijñaptimātra doctrine that holds that dependent co-arising (the other-dependent pattern of consciousness) becomes fully perfected by being cut off from the unenlightened imagination, so here worldly convention becomes then "worldly convention only" by breaking one's unenlightened attachment to it as *truth*. This realm of "worldly convention only" and "dependent co-arising only" is the field of reengagement. Thus, even the reengagement of the bodhisattva in the world, although freed from unenlightened attachment, is also worldly and conventional, and therefore must be described as occluded and dependently co-arisen. The restoration of worldly convention does not mean that the reengagement is elevated to a higher level of truth, but rather that it is lowered to the level of "worldly convention only." The bodhisattva appears within the same birth-death cycle as the unenlightened and participates fully in the transcience of that cycle.

Tsong-kha-pa's Three Kinds of Being

In his *Stages of the Path of Awakening* (*Lam rim chen-mo*) Tsong-kha-pa distinguishes three realms of understanding:[1] (1) true being (*satya-sattā*), (2) false being (*mṛṣā-sattā*), and (3) being only (*sattā-mātra*). For him, all awareness of being occurs in one of these modes. True being affirms autonomous essences in beings, and thus, it represents a basic attachment to beings as true. False being denies essential being and sees all being as an illusory phantom. Being-only neither affirms nor denies essential being, but recognizes being in its bare simplicity.

The unenlightened, lacking all insight into emptiness without essence and the phantom-like illusion of being, naively identify the first and third modes of understanding. Unable to grasp the third, "being-only," for what it is, they imagine being as having essences, which are then regarded as real and true. Their affirmation of being-only is a clinging to truth (*satya-grāha*). The traditional theme of self-clinging, here seen as a grasping at an imagined true reality, constitutes the basis for the birth-death cycle. Since no insight into the falsehood of such truth-clinging has occurred, existent beings are all regarded as really real. Being-to-its-limit, which is conventional, is erroneously taken as obviously real and true, precluding any differentiation of being-only from a world of essences. Even though essence-free dependent co-arising is identical with emptiness, the unenlightened adhere to an essentialist perspective from which being-only is obviously ultimately real. Thus, they draw no distinction between the two realms.

From such a standpoint, it is hard to understand why, even though dependent co-arising is accepted as true Buddhist doctrine, and the five aggregates, the twelve bases, and the eighteen realms, the four truths, and the thirty-seven factors favorable to awakening, and in general all Buddhist teachings are accepted as valid on the level of worldly convention, why then, fundamentally invalid notions such as that of an autonomous God are to be rejected as unacceptable or as worldly convention. If one speaks about being, then God has the same right to exist as dependent co-arising does. If one speaks about non-being, then dependently co-arisen beings must also be negated and Buddhist doctrine must be every bit as non-existent as God is. Because it fails to differentiate between being-only and true being as essences, the essentialist standpoint has no grounds for differentiating between the two truths and thus distinguishing what is to be negated from what is to be affirmed. As a result, it inevitably leads to the mistake of supposing either that

everything is false and non-existent or really true and contained in autonomous essences. The affirmation that being-to-its-limit is directly being-as-such does not imply any essentialistic being to whose truth and reality one can cling. Quite the contrary: it is only in an awareness of the differentiation of the two truths that being-to-its-limit can be affirmed as being-as-such.

For those who have the true insight into essence-free emptiness, being occurs in all three of the modes enunciated. True insight is not restricted to the notion of "being only," but also and more importantly refers to the second mode of "false being," aware that the reality of things is to be negated as a mere phantom. Moreover, since being-only is seen not to exist independently, the first category of true being is not entirely negated. Worldly intelligence that clings to true being is indeed rent asunder by the wisdom that discerns through reasoning (*yukti*) the phantom-like non-being of essences, but the accompanying awareness of true being is not rejected. Without it, the notion of real being in sage wisdom could not arise (nor would the notion of the Essence Body, or the Dharma Body of Buddha).

Prior to insight into emptiness, being-to-its-limit is equated with real being without differentiation. After the attainment of that insight, wisdom functions in all three modes of awareness and is able to differentiate between them. While able to negate any essential being, such as God, it validates conventional discourse itself as dependently co-arisen. The field of awareness centered on being-only then becomes the field for reengagement.

This differentiation of the modes of understanding being was given special emphasis by later Mādhyamika thinkers. They not only differentiated being-only from essential being, but in a similar vein distinguished the non-being of essence from complete nothingness, and arising-only from essential arising. Their affirmation of emptiness as the non-being of essences rejects only essences and is not an assertion of the complete nothingness of being in all senses. When the first stanza of *The Stanzas on the Middle* describes things as "not arising from themselves, nor from others, nor from both (self and others), nor from no cause," the terms "self" and "others" refer to essences. The stanza refutes any "arising from essences," but not "the bare occurrence of arising-only." In its treatment of arising from self or others, the stanza uses the term "arising" to mean that one should become enlightened to the being and non-being of essence-free and empty essences. Candrakīrti's *Introduction to the Middle* claims that this is the basic aim throughout Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas*. The non-being of essence signified by the refutation of arising is in no way contradictory to phenomenal arising and passing away. Indeed, it

affirms the phenomenal dependent co-arising of beings as originally present. What is rejected is only the proposition that there are self-contained essences. If one sees essence-free emptiness and the non-arising from self as contradictory to the everyday arising and passing away of things in the world, one is forced to choose between them. If one affirms beings as existent, all will be being; if as non-existent, all will be nothingness. Thus, the dichotomy set up rests on a failure to differentiate the two truths. Emptiness gets equated with absolute nothingness, and one falls either into an exclusive nihilism or into an essentialistic ontology that sees being as immutable and permanent. The non-being of essence, however, is meant to be an interpretation of being-only.

Such affirmations as "neither being nor not being" and "seeing that is not seeing" issue from an awareness of the identity of essence-free emptiness and being-only. Their paradoxical character does not stem from any pronouncement about an identity between absolute contradictions. The phrase "neither being nor not being" does not signify an inability to choose between the two or to know the difference between them. In the context of differentiation between the two truths, it promotes insight into the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising.

In his *Lucid Exposition*, Candrakīrti offers the following explanation:

> An objector states: If all things are claimed to be essence-free, then by your reasoning one would have to reject and negate anything the Bhagavat has taught about "the necessity of experiencing the results of one's own actions." You would not only negate action and its results, but end up as a complete nihilist (*nāstika*).
>
> Response: We are not nihilists. Rather we reject both theories of being and of nothingness, attempting thereby to elucidate the path of non-duality (*advaya-patha*) which leads to the realm of cessation. We do not reduce action, the performer of action, or its results to nothingness (*nāsti*). Rather we validate them as essence-free (*niḥ-svabhāva*). Some criticize us as being in error when we do so, on the grounds that no activity would be possible if there were no essences. But this does not follow. On the contrary, if things had essences, no activity would be possible. It is in being free of essence that activity can be affirmed.[2]

In the first part of the passage, the objection is leveled against Mādhyamika that because of its affirmation of essence-free emptiness, it falls into the error of nihilism. In response Candrakīrti explains that emptiness, far from being nihilism, is a method of affirming neither being nor non-being, which renders the establishment of worldly convention

possible for the first time. In asserting that as empty and essence-free, action, the performer of action, and its results are not nothing, we are able clearly to differentiate between nothingness and the absence of essence. Moreover, worldly convention is established in the affirmation that "if things had essences, no activity would be possible. It is in being free of essence that activity can be affirmed."

Reengagement as Being-Only, Dependent Co-Arising Only, and Phantom-Like

The realm of reengagement—the dependently co-arising, originally present world—is characterized as "dependently co-arising only" and "being-only." It is described not only as a clouded occlusion, but also as phantom-like in its illusory character. Indeed the content (*artha*) of the world of dependent co-arising, especially of reengagement in co-arising, is phantom-like, because in the context of enlightenment the world of co-arising is seen as a phantom. The principle in virtue of which one attains the certitude that things are empty because they are dependently co-arisen (i.e., the reasoning that is directed to transcendent insight), is generally described as *lugs* = *mata* (truth insight), while the rational principle in virtue of which all essence-free and empty things are manifested as causes and results is at times termed *tshul* = *naya, yukti* (logical process).[3] The phrase "phantom-like" expresses the aspects (*naya*) wherein things appear as causes and results in the world. Thus, the phantom character of beings is a basic principle complementing the essence-free and empty character of things.[4] In his *Commentary on the Treatise in Four Hundred Verses*, Candrakīrti expresses the same idea by teaching that the basic principle of the middle path is not nothingness but dependent co-arising. In thematizing being as dependent co-arising, one is not offering a theory of being but an insight into dependent co-arising. Since dependent co-arising is essence-free and empty, the content of dependent co-arising is the non-arising of essence, and the phantom traces of the passing of things.[5]

Through insight into emptiness, the *being* of essences is negated, while insight into the phantom character of things negates the *non-being* of their activity (*arthakriyā, vyāpāra*). This Mādhyamika attempt shows how the notion of essence-free emptiness refutes being and non-being alike, transcends them both and is apart from both, and that this is the import of the middle path. From this perspective, seeing the traces

of co-arising causal action as phantom-like is a particularly useful aid for understanding reengagement in the conventional world.

Tsong-kha-pa gives two interpretations for the phrase "phantom-like:"[6] The phantom character of the truth of ultimate meaning, and the phantom character of phenomenal beings. By the phantom character of ultimate meaning is meant that being-only (*sattā-mātra*) is not true-being (*satya-sattā*). Thus, being is not directly seen as reality, but appears as a phantom in which all essential being is negated. In contrast, when all the phenomenal beings of everyday dependent co-arising are falsified as essential being (*mṛṣā-sattā*), they are phantom-like in a more positive sense. According to Tsong-kha-pa, the phantom character of ultimate meaning is included in the phantom character of conventional being, but not vice versa.

The simile of this phantom character, along with others like the mirage and the reflection of the moon on the water, frequently appear in the scriptures and commentaries. They are often used in the Vijñapti-mātra system to describe the other-dependent pattern of consciousness. They help us to catch a glimpse of our world as a fleeting existence that passes away quickly like a flash of lightning or the morning dew, and as such are invitations to a transcendent insight into the emptiness of beings. That, on the one hand. On the other, the phrase "phantom traces" points to reengagement. The valid establishment of worldly convention then means that phantom-like being is constituted in the form of traces; their phantoms character taking on a more positive significance. Thus, worldly and conventional being is able to be established because it is essence-free and empty.

In the same context, Tsong-kha-pa presents another distinction of the phantom character drawn in terms of two kinds of in-sight. Despite being free of essence and empty, beings do appear in the world, just as a magician in plying his trade makes the onlookers really see images of nonexistent horses or oxen. Eye-sight sees the illusory forms of such horses and oxen, but reflective in-sight reasons and knows them to be empty and nonexistent, nothing more than phantom images. Eye-sight is ordinary sense-patterned knowing. It knows what is directly experienced in terms of worldly and conventional criteria (*pramāṇa*). In contrast, reflective in-sight is a reasoned understanding (*yukti*) that investigates the ultimate meaning of what is experienced. The phenomenal appearance of beings is not validated by true reason answering the question of what kind of causal continuity is operative in their "phantom-traces." Precisely because true reasoning must inevitably come to the ultimately meaningful emptiness and the non-being of beings, phenomenal being is already present as an originally supposition.

Conversely, the non-being of essence and emptiness is not easily understood by conventional verbal understanding, which apprehends phenomenal beings through words and brings the everyday world of appearances before our eyes. These phantom appearances are therefore established both through true reason and through knowing by means of verbal criteria. This is why the phantom character of ultimate meaning is contained in insight into the phantom character of phenomenal beings. In discussing and citing the ancient masters, Tsong-kha-pa explains:

> When one investigates arising and passing away through true reasoning, the emptiness and non-being of essence is described as empty like the empty sky. But the appearance and being of the conventional forms manifested as if essential, while being empty of essence, are described as empty like phantom traces.[7]

Here the interplay between phantom character and understanding is the same as that explained immediately above. The "emptiness like the empty sky" is the emptiness of ultimate meaning, the insight of concentrated wisdom, while the "emptiness like phantom traces" is conventional appearance and the establishment of worldly convention, which, unlike concentration, is subsequently attained. In his *Commentary to the Four Hundred Verse Treatise* Candrakīrti remarks:

> In this way, when one thoroughly investigates [by true reasoning], no essence of anything can be validated. Therefore, suchness remains in all myriad things like a phantom.[8]

This understanding of the phantom character of things is the result of insight into the essence-free emptiness of things. That is, it corresponds to what was termed above the phantom character of ultimate meaning. This means that emptiness embraces all beings as phantom traces. At the same time, these phantom *beings* remain even after they are seen to be empty. It is this trait of being left over, of remaining after awakening, that constitutes reengagement in the world. In this sense, phantom being seen as an originally present dependent co-arising also encompass emptiness.

Apropos of this, Candrakīrti notes that the true investigation of dependent co-arising is best likened to a phantom, not to the son of a stone woman. If one conducts the investigation only by true reasoning and simply negates being by logical refutation, the absence of the arising and passing away of all conditioned beings would be a pervasive and absolute nothingness, like the son of a stone woman, and dependent co-arising would also have to be regarded as non-existent. But there

is a world of sense awareness and direct experience quite apart from and prior to reasoning. It is not nonexistent like the stone woman's son, but must exist as phantom traces. This is the meaning of essence-free emptiness. Understood as phantom-like being, emptiness itself becomes the field on which reengagement reestablishes worldly convention.

Chapter 10

The Role of Reason

The Restoration of Reason

Finally we arrive at a stage when we can speak of a "reasoning" of emptiness. As seen above, the establishment of worldly convention, implying as it does a conversion from transcendence to life in the world through reengagement, can be truly achieved only on the level of practice. And one aspect of this practice is the development of logical reasoning, along with the various other cultural creations that issue from reasoning. This does not mean that reasoning is discovered here for the first time since rational articulation belongs to the originally present, dependently co-arising world from the start. What happens is that reason is resurrected and restored here in the act of grounding itself on emptiness through reengagement in the world. This means that reason becomes true, logically reasoned thinking. Thus, the restoration of reason is closely related to true reason (*yukti*) and knowledge based on criteria (*pramāṇa*). To anticipate our conclusion, the realms of ultimate meaning and worldly convention unfold through the intertwining of true reasoning and knowledge based on criteria. Thus, the establishment of worldly convention is based, on the one hand, on the absence of refutation by or interference from true reason, and on the other hand, on a validation through criteria (or not being negated by any worldly and conventional criteria). Let us look at each of these more closely.

The doctrine of the two truths and their differentiation is based on the need for a valid establishment of worldly convention, and more particularly of reason. The usual criticism leveled against Mādhyamika reasoning is the incompatability of emptiness with any valid and logical thinking. In its most general form, such criticism tried to show that,

if all things are empty and without essence and if nothing exists beyond emptiness, then nothing whatsoever can exist at all—and how then could any existent thing be considered true? If everything is empty and without essence, the Mādhyamika discourse on emptiness, its middle path, and its reasoning are empty and must themselves be nonexistent and untrue. Must one not then also negate the Mādhyamika version of logical reasoning and its theory of emptiness?

The problem with this criticism is that it misses the distinction examined earlier between "being-only" and "self-enclosed being," or between the absence of essence and complete nothingness. It is rather an example of "emptiness ineptly apprehended," inasmuch as it pays no heed to the differentiation of the worldly and conventional from ultimate meaning. In point of fact, the Buddha did articulate a doctrine. He did venture to bring the inconceivable and ineffable ultimate realm to speech, and thus to establish worldly convention from an awareness of essence-free emptiness. His teaching represents the development of a verbal and reasoned doctrine (*dharma-deśana*), and the structure of the two truths builds on this articulation to present the logical form of this single, all-encompassing world.

An anti-Mādhyamika criticism leveled by a realist philosopher (*vastu-vādin*) is reported in *The Stanzas on the Middle:*

> If everything is empty (*śūnya*),
> There is neither arising (*udaya*) nor passing away (*vyaya*).
> According to your (Mādhyamika) teaching,
> You would have to say that
> Even the Four Truths do not exist (24.1).

If everything is empty in Mādhyamika, then the entire reality of the path of practice together with all truth must be negated. All the Buddhist teachings about bondage and liberation, the birth-death cycle and cessation, arising and passing away—even the Four Truths themselves—are then invalid. The critic may have been a learned and scholarly individual, but the critique itself exhibits a failure to understand the meaning of emptiness. The Mādhyamika response argues:

> If everything is not empty,
> There would be no arising and no passing away.
> According to your [realist] opinion,
> You would have to say that
> The Four Truths are non-existent (24.20).

Quite the contrary from the critique, non-empty, self-enclosed essences preclude the possibility of any establishment of worldly convention. Emptiness does not expel worldly convention or totally negate all mundane affirmations. Far from being an escape into ultimate meaning, emptiness is the only context in which conventional discourse can be validated.

Before presenting a response (24.20) to the objection (24.1), *The Stanzas on the Middle* inserts a number of stanzas on the two truths, all to the point that if things are not empty, nothing can be established as valid; that precisely because of the differential structure of the two truths, emptiness can be seen as the establishment of worldly convention, not its expulsion. Several of these stanzas (7-19) have been quoted and treated above. Suffice it here to mention the eighth stanza, which states that "all buddhas preach doctrine in reliance on the two truths," and the tenth, which says that "without relying on conventional truth, the highest, ultimate meaning cannot be realized."

In the lives of the Buddha presented in both the Northern and Southern traditions of Buddhism it is reported that after the Bhagavat attained awakening, he saw into the lives of all sentient beings and, aware of the great difficulty they would have in understanding the depths of his doctrine, abandoned the desire to preach supreme awakening. *The Stanzas on the Middle* state (24.12):

> This doctrine is indeed deep and subtle. The Bhagavat, aware that it could not be realized by persons of dull faculties, did not desire to preach it (Kumārajīva's translation: T.30, p. 33a.14-15).[1]

At the earnest request and encouragement of the god Brahmā, however, the Buddha did agree to preach and set out on a course that was to run forty-five years. Had he not emerged from the realm of ultimately meaningful silence to reenter the conventional world and preach, there would be no history of Buddhism and no Buddhist community. Buddhist doctrine would be mute, and not even the teaching about the three jewels, the foundation stones of the community, would have arisen. The Buddha's preaching is a validation of the establishment of worldly convention and an exercise in verbal expression and reasoning. The preaching of doctrine and the consequent establishment of worldly convention are both applications of the structure of the two truths. This is why the eighth stanza says that "all buddhas preach doctrine in reliance on the two truths."

This eighth stanza is directly related to the preceding stanza that presents the character, use, and content of emptiness (treated above)

and, together with it, implies that the critic does not understand emptiness or its content, namely, that he has not differentiated the two truths.

Prior to commenting on the eighth stanza, Candrakīrti depicts the critic "who is not clear about the differentiation of the two truths" as "a book-addict" who merely analyzes and memorizes the surface meaning of words while failing to grasp how the Bhagavat's teaching flows from the differentiation of the two truths. Such people lack understanding of how conventional co-arising functions through emptiness.

The first stanza of Nāgārjuna's *Overturning Vain Disputations* thematizes conventional reasoning in connection with the establishment of worldly convention through reengagement, and goes on to ask the question whether emptiness does not negate all conventional reasoning.

> If the essences of all beings do not exist at all,
> Then your (Mādhyamika) words are also without essence.
> Then you would be unable to refute essences
> [By words that are themselves empty] (stanza 1).

The realist critique argues that if all things are empty, speech and reasoning cannot be validated, and thus neither logical refutation (*pratiṣedha, dūṣana*) nor demonstration (*sādhana*) are possible. The second stanza takes up the point at some length, ending only with the twenty-first stanza in which Nāgārjuna makes his response. Citing the phrase "without reliance on speech, ultimate meaning cannot be expressed" from his *The Stanzas on the Middle*, he offers a detailed argument on the nature of knowledge based on criteria (*pramāṇa*).

The thrust of Nāgārjuna's response is that the validation of reasoning is not grounded in any presupposition about the reality behind the words articulating rationality, but in the fact that words are already empty and without essence. Like characters in an animated cartoon battling one another, words, because they are without essence, can construct verbal reasoning to prove that all is without essence and empty. Logical reasoning is validly established on a ground that is not logical reasoning, just as theory is established on a non-theoretical ground. This does not mean that reasoning in conventional discourse is illogical or flawed as theory, but only that for ultimate meaning logical reasoning and theory are empty and without essence. To revert to earlier terminology, they are validated in a context of "reasoning-only" and "theory-only." Conventional reasoning and theory are truly validated to the extent that they do not claim truth.

How then do the two truths relate to logical reasoning? On the one hand, ultimate meaning does not govern conventional reasoning. On the

other, conventional reasoning is unable to attain ultimate meaning. The former statement means that in reengagement with the world, reason is restored and is validly established as conventional; while the latter indicates that in its transcendent orientation, reason recognizes its limitation and remains within the frame of worldly convention. Without these insights, reasoning cannot be validated.

Truly Reasoned Understanding and Knowledge Based on Criteria

There is no end to interpretations of the nature of reason, but in the general Mādhyamika and Buddhist usage, reason is generally circumscribed by the terms *tarka* (dialectics), *yukti, nyāya* (formally correct reasoning), and *pramāṇa* (knowledge grounded by criteria). For Candrakīrti the term *tarka* is seen in terms of Bhāvaviveka's thesis of a self-sufficient reasoning and is thus refuted for being logical reasoning within a context of realism.[2] It is seen as metaphysical reasoning seeking to ground itself on the criteria of direct perception and inference and thus to assert the reality of knowledge derived from sensation. Candrakīrti often uses the terms "truly reasoned wisdom" and "knowledge based on criteria." The distinction between these two terms is not entirely clear, but we may at least give a general sketch.

Truly reasoned understanding is "an intelligent examination (*yoniśovicāra*) of questions of being and non-being, arising and non-arising, relative to the things that constitute the content (*artha*) of that reasoning."[3] Beings are not able to stand up under the weight of such an examination by true reasoning, and unable to maintain their essences, are revealed as without essence and empty. In contrast, "knowledge based on criteria" is the affirmation of being to conventional things.[4] Sense-patterned knowing never sees reality, for in the realm of ultimate meaning, "nothing in the world," whether objects of vision, hearing, smell, or so forth, "can be validated by such criteria."[5] Awareness of the ultimately meaningful comes through the "truly reasoned understanding" of an examination into reality, but no knowledge based on criteria can ever make "contact" with ultimate reality.

The conventional world is, meantime, established through knowledge based on criteria; truly reasoned understanding does not come into the picture. Focusing as it does on the essence-free emptiness of beings, truly reasoned understanding does not ground their phenomenal being. This distinction between "truly reasoning" and "knowledge based

on criteria" parallels that between ultimate meaning and worldly convention.

Among the many Buddhist theories regarding the criteria for knowledge, some admit only the two criteria of direct perception and inference, while others extend the list to three or four criteria found in the conventional world and recognized as such. But even then in this latter case, the basic criteria remain direct perception and inference. Thus, knowledge based on criteria is mainly knowledge based on sense-patterned knowing (direct perception), while true reasoning usually denotes the logical refutation at the core of Mādhyamika dialectics (inference). This does not mean that true reasoning is itself limited to inference or that knowledge based on criteria itself is limited to direct perception. Inference is indeed generally thought to come about on the basis of direct perception, but this relationship does not hold in the present case where true reasoning and knowledge based on criteria are aligned with ultimate meaning and worldly convention respectively.

Moreover, when it comes to explaining precisely what this direct perception that underlies inference is, there is a divergence of opinion. Buddhist dialectitians (such as Digñāga and Dharmakīrti) regarded direct perception as a knowledge of the undifferentiated and bare giveness of sensory contact (although on this point there were many different theories among Buddhists); they considered sense-patterned knowing as directly seeing and coinciding with the "particular mark" (*svalakṣaṇa*) being sensed. On the one hand, this particular mark was contrasted with the "common marks" (*samānya-lakṣaṇa*) of things, such as impermanence, which characterize all things and which are known through inference. On the other hand, to speak of a realization of the particular mark amounts to a reaffirmation of essence in beings. Consequently, insofar as the dialectitians granted conventional validity to "a knowledge based on criteria through direct perception and inference," they hold that the world is constructed by such knowledge based on criteria, and cannot avoid the implication that such criterial knowing takes over the value of ultimate meaning and wisdom in its "seeing" of essences. Candrakīrti, however, rejected the conclusion that dialectics is reasoning based on an essentialistic understanding of being. He argued that reasoning must rather be based on an understanding of emptiness. This assertion represents the main trait that distinguishes Mādhyamika reasoning.

This approach to reason implies a distinction between true reasoning and knowledge based on criteria. True reasoning functions by inference, but an inference based on direct perception that is essence-free and empty. In direct perception of this sort, sense-patterned knowing sees

green as green, as worldly and conventional, and is already the clouded occlusion of primal ignorance. Thus, true reasoning cannot but finally be characterized as illusory, and this of course applies to the inference discussed by the dialecticians as well. Still, insofar as this reasoning exhibits the same character as the inference of the dialectitians—which aims at a full awareness of particulars, even while remaining illusory—it can be called "true reasoning" in the sense that it is a rational examination into reality. True reason must be concerned with an "examination of reality," and not simply with questions of being or non-being within the conventional world. The childlike people of the conventional world do not raise doubts about the being or non-being of the conventional world; they simply accept things as they are presented through conventional custom and language. As yet unencumbered by learning (*siddhārtha*), such people do not turn away from the world on the strength of some theory. If true reasoning is turned against this world, the world must succumb to it; it cannot avoid being negated and falling into nihilism. This would be a direct incursion of ultimate meaning into the conventional world. But when worldly convention, in either non-Buddhist or Buddhist teaching, goes beyond the world of everyday living, when it turns into an inflated scholasticism, it is validated by means of a theory of immutable essences that affirms the reality of its being. The sharp sword of true reasoning must be drawn against such delusions. It is because such people hold to the notion of "essential being" that they must be refuted through true reasoning on emptiness and the absence of essence.

In contrast to the employment of true reasoning regarding ultimate meaning and emptiness, worldly convention is validated through "knowledge based on criteria." Not even true reasoning can negate the worldly and conventional knowledge based on criteria, which constitutes the world in which without mistake we see green as green. It is said to be based on criteria because it is true and real worldly convention, that is, because it does not involve a sense-error. The world of direct sense perception is the self-validating world of "worldly convention-only."

If sense-patterned awareness is not insight into ultimate meaning, true reason must not meddle in worldly convention. In virtue of the difference between true reasoning and knowledge based on criteria, insight into the absence of essence and emptiness of true reasoning entails that knowledge based on criteria is the "being-only" of conventional co-arising. While the being of knowledge based on criteria does not contradict the non-being of true reasoning, neither should it be confused with it.

The Two Mādhyamika Sects: Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika

The later schism of Mādhyamika into Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika branches draws our attention to another aspect of the role of reason. The chief figure on the Svātantrika side was Bhāvaviveka; the Prāsaṅgika were represented by Buddhapālita and above all Candrakīrti. The names of the sects themselves were fixed by Tibetan commentators drawing on Candrakīrti's texts, and probably do not indicate well-defined schools in India. Nonetheless, there are clear differences of opinion among Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti. A number of elements come into play here, among them relationships with the Vijñaptimātra school, which in turn also split into two branches. Another major factor was a difference of approach to reason, which surfaced in the discussion on the valid establishment of a worldly conventional understanding that would not stagnate in silent emptiness.

The name Svātantrika immediately calls to mind the term *pāratantrika*, the theory of other-dependence. Although the term *pāratantrika* does not appear in the textual sources and, of course, is not used as the name of any sect, we can surmise that the term *svatantra*, independent (i.e. self-dependent), originated in contrast to *paratantra*, other-dependent. In fact, Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika sect often made use of the notion of other-dependence, where it is frequently employed to describe dependent co-arising, dependence on the power of others, and reengagement in worldly convention. As a logical term, other-dependence refers to the employment of reasoned inference, a reasoning "deduced from something else" (*paraprasiddha*), as will be treated later. At its deepest level, however, the *svatantra-paratantra* dispute relates to the question of being: anything that exists "independently" implies some kind of essential being, while "other-dependence" connotes absolutely other-dependent existence, empty of essence. These questions about being are always just under the surface of the formal logical disputations couched in terms of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika contrast.

The theory that the Prāsaṅgika sect represented the main stream of Mādhyamika earned wide recognition through Atiśa and Tsong-kha-pa. There is historical evidence that Bhāvaviveka's Svātrantika lineage, which was rather close to Sautrantika thought, disappeared comparatively early for want of followers, while the Svātrantika sect of Santarakṣita, which coalesced with Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra themes and adopted the thesis that external objects do not exist, seems to have come very close to the Prāsaṅgika approach.

The general characteristic of all Svātantrika thinkers is that, while

affirming emptiness, they also acknowledge the self-enclosed essence of particular beings as linguistic realities (*vyavahāratas*). Consequently, in explaining emptiness through logical reasoning, they held that independent, self-sufficient reasons (*hetu*) must be present in its procedures (*prayoga*) and inferences (*anumāna*). These reasons constitute the being of language, and because they were regarded as independently valid reasons, the school was known as Svātantrika, that is, those who affirm independence.

In contrast, Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika did not recognize any self-enclosed, essential being present in language and argued that all attempts to validate independent reasons necessarily fall into logical contradictions and conundrums. Because they argued that these contradictions were inevitable, the school was termed Prāsaṅgika, that is, those who affirm the inevitability of error. The Prāsaṅgika thinkers did discuss logical procedure and inference, but they maintained that the constituent elements of logic—thesis, reason, and example—must not be regarded in any sense as essential entities.

The basic difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, then, is that while Bhāvaviveka affirmed essences enunciated in language, Candrakīrti denied that even as language expressions essences exist.[6] Bhāvaviveka's affirmation of conventionally existent essences was probably directed against the assertion of the Yogācāra-Vijñaptimātra school that in the realm of worldly convention external objects do not in the final analysis really exist, and that in ultimate meaning they are no more than conscious constructs.

But there is more to Bhāvaviveka's view. Even the affirmation of conventionally existent essences is not without insight. He insisted that the status of the entire conventional world as "being-only" be seen concretely to construct "true being." In this sense the being of worldly convention, and its presence in language as "the appropriation of truth," cannot be negated. When reasoning is expressed in language, it must concretize itself in the world of conventional being. Even when the enlightened, who have gained insight into emptiness, reason, they also must enunciate true being concretely. If there were no true being, there would be no common idiom between the enlightened and the unenlightened. Therefore, it must be admitted that essential entities do exist as expressed in conventional language, and that the sense-patterned awareness of the five senses wherein self-enclosed essences do appear is not *in itself* deluded. Nor is discriminative reflection on these self-enclosed essences as existent deluded. When the eye sees a green object as green or the ear hears variations of tone and pitch, these perceptions cannot be regarded as delusory or mistaken, but must be reckoned as

realities expressed in language. To reject such conventionally existent essences as simply errors leaves no room for a logical and intelligible world at all. Logical reasoning becomes impossible. There are no reasons or examples held in common with (*sāmānya*) one's opponent in argumentation, and the requisite foundations for inference and discussion are completely undermined. If this were the case, the doctrine of Śākyamuni could never have been articulated. Hence, to be logical and rational, to establish the validity of worldly convention, one must admit "essential being" in some sense as language.[7]

The first chapter of Candrakīrti's *Lucid Exposition* presents the basic Prāsaṅgika criticism of the Svātantrika opinion of Bhāvaviveka we have just outlined. The Svātrantika position had argued its case on the basis of the "linguistic essences" of independent reasons. This is the basis for the Svātantrika "independently valid inference" (*svatantra-anumāna*). Candrakīrti refutes this inference by showing that neither its thesis (*dharmin:* that there does exist an independently valid inference) nor its reason (*hetu:* that there exists linguistic essences) have been validly established,[8] because the thesis and the reason are regarded as independent. Inference here means the establishment of logical procedure (*prayoga*), and such knowledge based on criteria cannot but be regarded as critically grounded in *particulars.* To begin with, one argues in the same context (*sāmānya*) as one's opponent—here, the realist—and presupposes some common points of reference. There are reasoning processes that have to be followed and theses that need to be validated. When an inference is presented to a realist by a proponent of the absence of essence, who thereby argues in the same context and on the same level as the realist, the advocte of emptiness must function with a realistic notion of reason, example, and logical procedure.

Bhāvaviveka's claim is that, if Mādhyamika wishes to clarify its middle path to the world and to the other schools, it must first stand on the same level as they, and yet maintain its own independent procedure of reasoning. He insists that the Mādhyamikans must, by their own independent reasons and examples, refute and invalidate (*dūṣana*) mistaken views or demonstrate (*sādhana*) the true Mādhyamikan insight. But the assertion of independence for its own linguistic essences, even if understood in a Mādhyamika fashion, does constitute a realistic theory of existent essences. Essential and independent essences of this sort issue in a theory of the real existence of selfhood which would elevate Mādhyamika thought above the conventional world, thus disclosing its own internal contradiction (*anumāna-virodha*). Mādhyamika refutations worked out through the notions of emptiness and the absence of essence, however, were originally meant to point to this contradiction

(*prasaṅga-āpatti*). Logical reasoning in Mādhyamika is aimed at leading the opponent to an awareness of self-contradictions. If one allows Bhāvaviveka's inference of independence, then in virtue of the need for such independently valid reasons, there is no way to avoid logical errors. Bhāvaviveka himself was probably forced to agree with this evaluation after Candrakīrti demonstrated at length the two logical errors of an unestablished thesis and reason in his criticism of independent inference.

The Prāsaṅgika thinkers rejected the presence of any "independently valid inference" (*svatantra-anumāna*)[9] or independent logical structure. While protecting themselves from the logical errors just referred to, they argued that Mādhyamika, too, must have a specifically Mādhyamikan reasoning: the use of inference in its logical presentation of the reason and the example.[10] But that reasoning is not to be expressed in any independently valid inference, since it is sufficient to adopt the inferential assumptions of the realist opponent. This is described as "the criteria admitted by the other party" (*para-prasiddha-pramāṇa*).[11] Nor does the Prāsaṅgika adhere singlemindedly to silence and stagnate in a realm of ultimate meaning, since knowledge based on criteria and inference do occur within that realm. Yet the Mādhyamika thinker need not personally identify with such reasoning based on criteria, for it is enough that it be employed as admitted by the other party.[12]

These criteria admitted by the other party are the embodiment in terms of logical reasoning of "that which is originally present." The idea that it is enough to employ the criteria of the other and that no additional independent ground of one's own is possible reflects the statement that "if ultimate meaning does not rely upon worldly convention, it cannot be expressed." As a theory Mādhyamika is unable to articulate its own true insight (*darśana*) through its own forms of expression, inasmuch as theoretical conclusions (*siddhānta*) would contain within themselves the cause of their own collapse. Mādhyamika can be brought to speech only through the reasoning of others, only in virtue of reasons and examples admitted as valid by others. Even the teaching enunciated by Śākyamuni does not offer a method beyond conventional discourse. It discloses enlightenment to the world by identifying with the otherness of the world.[13] This is true empathy with the world.

Mādhyamika is therefore not the presentation of its own view through its own reasoning. Rather it brings the propositions and theses (*pratijñā*) advocated by others to self-deconstruction within the criteria advocated by those others, and guides them to emptiness. Its efficacy lies in the disclosure of internal contradictions in what is advocated

by the other party through the other's own criteria.[14] It reasons to conclusions undesired and unanticipated by the other through reasons and examples admitted as valid by the other. By following a logic deemed reasonable by the other, one enables that other to see how his or her own reasoning inevitably leads to error. This is why Candrakīrti and his disciples were termed Prāsaṅgika, those who teach the inevitability of error.

An Example of Prāsaṅgika Reasoning

The Prāsaṅgika procedure of employing the reasoning admitted as valid by the other party does not differ from earlier Mādhyamika practices and closely parallels the reasoning pursued throughout Nāgārjuna's *Stanzas on the Middle.* As an example of this (see note 8) we give Candrakīrti's treatment of a passage from Nāgārjuna's *The Stanzas* (3.2), which states:

> Seeing does not see its own selfhood.
> If it cannot see its own selfhood,
> Then how can it see [the selfhood of] others?
> (Kumārajīva's translation: T.30, p. 6a)

Candrakīrti presents the logical progression of this inference as follows.

1. *yatra yatra svātmādarśanaṃ tatra tatra paradarśanam api nāsti.*
   Inasmuch as something cannot see its own selfhood, neither can it see [the selfhood of] others.
2. *tad-yathā ghaṭe.*
   For example, like pots [which, being unable to see themselves, cannot see others either].
3. asti ca cakṣuṣaḥ svātma-adarśanaṃ.
   But the eye cannot see its own selfhood.
4. *tasmāt para-darśanam apy asya naivāsti.*
   Therefore the eye cannot see [the selfhood of] others either.*

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*Translator's note: Nāgārjuna here negates the Abhidharma view that the faculties first perceive their own self essence and then the essence of others. Having already negated any inner selfhood that might be the primary object of perception, Nāgārjuna extends that negation to the self-essences of external things. Candrakīrti explicates his reasoning. The first statement presents not Nāgārjuna's own thinking, but a thesis acknowledged by the

This sequence is understood by Stcherbatsky as progressing from major thesis, to example, to minor, to conclusion (*The Concept of Buddhist Nirvāṇa* p. 118, 1977 ed., p. 124). Here Candrakīrti employs the criteria admitted by the other party in order to draw a conclusion not desired by that other party, for if one grants the minor (*hetu:* reason) that the eye cannot see its own selfhood, an assertion admitted by the other, then he must grant the demonstrated conclusion (*sādhya*) that it "cannot see [the selfhood of] others either." Despite the fact that the eye is eye precisely because "it sees others," this reasoning demonstrates that the eye cannot see others in any essentialistic context.

Yet one must not take this Prāsaṅgika procedure of adapting the logical reasoning of others to mean that the reason and example adduced are admitted only by the other party, and in fact is termed "admitted by the other" precisely because they do not accord with Mādhyamika thinking. The subject "seeing," the example "pots," the reason "not seeing it own selfhood," and the predicate "not seeing others" are all admissible for Mādhyamika as well. What it cannot admit is that any reasoning constructed from these elements could validly deduce self-enclosed essences, even if these latter are understood as no more than linguistic essences. Because the opponent, an essentialistic realist, does think that his inferences represent essences, in the Mādhyamika reasoning procedure they are only "the criteria admitted by the other party."

If then the Mādhyamika thinker regards the criteria admitted by the other party as empty, even as articulated in language, what significance can be attached to it? How can one come to understand the Mādhyamika insight through erroneous criteria that Mādhyamika refuses to acknowledge as valid? In the extreme, if there is no objection to using the criteria of the opponent, the Mādhyamika thinker should be able to show true reasoning through the errors of the opponent.

These questions reflect the basic concern of whether or not there is a conventional path of transcendence leading eventually to ultimate meaning. But the question itself issues from the failure to differentiate the two truths, to distinguish between essential being and being-only.

Candrakīrti does not refuse to accept the linguistic validity of logical procedures such as the reason and the example; they are what the Prāsaṅgikas call "conventional being." As worldly and conventional,

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realist opponent, in this case an Abhidharma thinker who holds that the faculties perceive the selfhood of things because they first perceive an inner selfhood. The force of Candrakīrti's reasoning derives not from the cogency of his own logic, but from the falsifiability of the opponent's deductions.

they are the objects of sound sensation. They are worldly convention only, being-only, and not to be refuted by true reasoning. The problem is that the opponent regards these logical concepts not as being-only but as reflecting essences, and thinks that knowledge based on criteria can know these essences. This opinion needs to be refuted by true reasoning that shows them to be without essence and empty.

Knowledge based on criteria is the reasoning that validates conventional discourse. Far from refuting conventional being-only, true reasoning discerns "essences" and inevitably leads to insight into their emptiness. This is why the reason in Prāsaṅgika must be demonstrated in the language accepted by the other party, even though the thesis built on this reason and expressed in this language is refuted. Thus, the reason-example-thesis-conclusion adopted in Mādhyamika reasoning must needs have their "reality" as language in worldly convention, but knowledge so based on criteria with its recognition of essences can absolutely not be said to participate in ultimate meaning.

The constituent elements of Mādhyamika reasoning (reason, example, thesis, and conclusion that have to be demonstrated in language) are already validated in their original status as worldly and conventional, and stand in need of no further demonstration by any true Mādhyamika reasoning. Indeed, it was such a new and independent demonstration of the validity of these elements of true reasoning that Svātrantika attempted, resulting in the errors outlined above. Worldly convention is validly established by direct sense perception and reasoned about through inference. In a word, it is established in knowledge based on criteria (*pramāṇa*) which in turn centers on sense-patterned awareness (*indriya-jñāna*). But knowledge based on the criteria of seeing phenomenal being and hearing phenomenal sounds cannot usurp the role that true reasoning plays in the quest for ultimate meaning.

The argument that "seeing does not see its own selfhood" shows that the eye does not exist as an essence (*svabhāva-virodha*) that can see things. Therefore, the affirmation that the eye "which cannot see its own selfhood" yet "does see [the selfhood of] others" is a contradiction. How can this contradiction be demonstrated? Can it be done on the basis of criteria? Or is it "that which is admitted by the other party" because the opponent has already granted it? Or perhaps is it only that the Mādhyamika thinker thinks so? If the opponent were to regard his or her reasoning as only provisional, there would be no more disagreement with the Mādhyamika thinker and hence no need for refutation. In short, if one proceeds from the suppositions of one's opponent, would one not simply arrive at his or her conclusions and thus foreclose the possibility of Mādhyamika insight? Conversely, if the Mādhyamika party

were to proceed only from the Mādhyamika way of thinking, how could he or she really engage in dialogue and avoid falling into dogmatism?

The disclosure of contradiction therefore necessarily involves knowledge based on criteria (*pramāṇa*) and the use of logical inference. And, if one is to have recourse to criteria, this knowledge and these criteria must be common (*sāmānya*) to both parties in the debate. But then how can one speak of "criteria admitted only by the other party?"

Thus, it would appear insufficient for Mādhyamika reasoning to proceed only on the basis of the other's suppositions because this would preclude refutation of the other and give no outlet for one's own insight. The necessary employment of common criteria must be allowed to disclose contradictions in logical reasoning. Yet it remains true that the ensuing knowledge based on criteria must not proceed from one's own independent reasoning. The adoption and employment of the criteria of others means at least that one acknowledges the criteria and knowledge of the other without at the same time regarding them as a self-sufficient or independent knowledge that could be made one's own. One cannot evince a demonstration of the emptiness of beings by means that are themselves essential beings, that is, by positing essentialistic reasons and examples as one's own independent knowledge. What is the real reason for the fact that one must suppose that which is supposed by the other? Merely this: that criteria (*pramāṇa*), even when comparative and deductive, must entail the assumption of self-enclosed essences on the part of the other, that is, they must correspond to the essentialistic thinking of the other.

This does not mean that the content of one's own "self-acknowledged" awakening is elevated to the status of a rationality that can descend from the heavenly realms of ultimate meaning into worldly convention. The target for reasoning is "that which is accepted by the other" within the context of primal ignorance, and that is what becomes the concrete basis for reasoning. If reasoning were not dependent on and conjoined to the assumptions of self-enclosed realities admitted by the other, and if the other had already understood the absence of essence, there would already be insight into Mādhyamika. It is precisely because the other party is a naive realist who has *not* gained such insight that knowledge based on criteria and true reasoning are needed. Consequently, if there is to be any dialogue at all, the other's criteria must be taken as the common basis, because it is his or her illusory thinking.

To summarize, all the logical errors of realism are exposed and refuted by the sword of realism itself. The essentialist thesis is self-refuting. In other words, to point out that whenever one apprehends essences in beings, the being of such essences calls forth internal contra-

dictions is an inference that takes place within knowledge based on criteria. Moreover, this knowledge must be that which is admitted by the other, for one must always follow what the other acknowledges as valid. In this way, the actual functioning of the subject-object polarity of language is seen to be present in the non-being of essence. The criteria considered valid by the other are thus truly designated as essences through "true reasoning," but this option is not available in a theory of independent, self-sufficient inference. This means that the absence of essence, even as linguistic essences, can be validly demonstrated within the criteria of verbal discourse. Thus, it is through a knowledge based on criteria that in turn is empty of self-essence that objects are recognized as truly without essence. Since refutation by means of the notion of the absence of essence is directed to the assumption of the being of essences by the other party, it is not a negation of being-only or of worldly convention-only. If it were, it would also negate any establishment of worldly convention, and hence logical reasoning itself.

The basic difference between the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika comes down to this: while the former regards the reason (*hetu*) of inference to be an independently valid ground on which to assert the Mādhyamika contention by employing a logical structure admitted as valid by both parties, the later adopts inference as grounded in the three conditions of a valid reason as accepted by the other party in an attempt to show that the other's assertion itself implies the non-being of essence. Thus, the examples of logical reasoning in *The Stanzas on the Middle* are not Nāgārjuna's own words. There are several hundred or even thousand such words, but they are all admitted as valid only by the opponent. They are granted by Nāgārjuna in this limited context as being-only, as worldly convention-only. But there is not among them a single word in which Nāgārjuna himself propounds a thesis. It is through such "magically-wrought" words themselves that the nature of words as phantom constructs is disclosed.

The Difference Between True Reasoning and Knowledge Based on Criteria

The differentiation of the two truths is the key to understanding the restoration of worldly convention as reasoning. As argued above, no transcending thrust of human reasoning and inference can ever attain ultimate meaning. The demonstration of ultimate meaning does not proceed along a course of the realistic criteria of direct perception or

inference. In so far as it is a true investigation of reality, such a demonstration must depend on something that can be called "true reasoning." Even the contemplative concentration of the enlightened is backed up by the working of such true reasoning.

In contrast, this kind of true reasoning cannot govern the workings of worldly convention. As insight into ultimate meaning, it is absolutely other than, and not to be confused with, the realistic criteria of conventional discourse. The seeing of green and red colors and the deduced inferences from such perceptions imply no insight into ultimate meaning. As noted above (see note 4), Candrakīrti in his *Introduction to the Middle* states that worldly and conventional things "cannot be the criteria" for ultimate meaning, since they are unable to recognize the presence of ultimate meaning. If worldly convention were an adequate measure for ultimate meaning, worldly convention itself would constitute true insight into reality. And if reality can be circumscribed within worldly convention, there is no need for any holy path.[15] Obviously such an approach precludes the possibility of ultimate meaning beyond worldly convention.

Thus, insight into ultimate meaning is not knowledge based on criteria, but must involve true reasoning. At the same time, true reasoning must not insert itself into the conventional world. As Candrakīrti says, "our investigations are focused solely on the essences of beings."[16] True reasoning examines the being or non-being of the essences of things, but insight into either being or non-being in regard to essences is not itself the insight that negates the cycle of arising and passing away. The affirmation that there is no essence in arising and passing away does not mean that arising and passing away do not exist. The wisdom of enlightened concentration sees no arising or passing away, and on this point differs from knowledge based on criteria. But, arising and passing away are not simply reduced to nothingness in virtue of that wisdom. Rather, their original form is clarified. Thus, one must distinguish what cannot stand up to true reasoning from what is totally negated by true reasoning. This is the reason for the differentiation of the two truths.

"Not standing up to" (*na kṣamate*) true reasoning means that the essential being of things finds no support in any intelligible analysis and therefore things must be without essence and empty. It does not imply the total rejection (*apakāra, ghātana*) of beings as nothingness. The understanding of true reasoning and the understanding of propositional statements stand in mutual tension, such that neither should usurp to itself a more eminent or efficacious role than the other and neither should infringe upon the other.

Mādhyamika thinkers criticized those who, like the Vijñaptimātra masters, employed an ultimately valid reasoning to speak about conventional being and non-being. They argued that they were muddled about the establishment of worldly convention and inept at differentiating the two truths. They regarded the theory of Vijñaptimātra aimed at demonstrating the non-being of external things as an illicit use of ultimately meaningful wisdom to judge the conventional world by true insight into the reality of things. Worldly convention is validated through worldly and conventional principles; one cannot negate its status as worldly convention-only. If that were possible, it would be easy to negate worldly convention through an understanding of true reasoning. Then there would be no need for people to undertake practice or asceticism in order to reach being-only. Indeed, everything might be solved merely by the use of the realistic criteria of everyday, common sense perception and knowing. As we have just noted, the path would serve no purpose if everyday, verbal understanding were able to grasp ultimate meaning. Or again, if an ultimately meaningful understanding of true reasoning inserted itself into the conventional world and demonstrated its non-being through insight into emptiness, the path would be futile.

The fact is, however, that being-only remains the clouded occlusion of worldly convention, its understanding and content are enveloped in a confusion that cannot be relieved by true reasoning, but only by the path. If true reasoning could eliminate worldly convention by means of an ultimately valid rationality, the path could not be established as valid. The path arises out of the differential tension between ultimate meaning and worldly convention. It is based on the mutual non-infringement of true reasoning and verbal understanding.

Moreover, if true reasoning intrudes itself into worldly convention, it is at once destroyed by worldly convention, with the result that true reasoning about emptiness and non-being is negated. Articulated understanding, as far as worldly convention is concerned, is more efficacious than any wisdom of true rationality. While true reasoning grounds ultimate meaning, it neither engenders worldly convention nor obliterates it. Worldly convention derives from a principle beyond the employment of true reasoning; it is established from the beginning. There should be no confusion on this point in the establishment of the two truths.

The differentiation of the two truths sets up a field of practice (the "path") and a field on which worldly convention is established in reengagement. This is why it can lead to logical reasoning. In his *Lucid Exposition*, Candrakīrti insists that the two truths not be lumped together, that an ultimately valid wisdom not be applied to worldly

convention. We must, he says, establish worldly convention as valid, not eliminate it:

> Because the realist's understanding remains muddled about the distinction (*vibhāga*) between the two truths of worldly convention and ultimate meaning, he employs arguments (*upapatti*) against worldly convention, saying that it does not correspond to (*anyāya*) true reasoning. But we, being skillful in establishing the truth of worldly convention, adapt conventionally reasonable theses (*pakṣa*), and lay to rest all reasoning that pretends to put aside some aspect of worldly convention by means of a different kind of reasoning. In this way, acting as do elders in the world, although we refute you who denigrate traditional usages in the world, we do not refute worldly convention itself.[17]

This passage is difficult to interpret and my above translation differs somewhat from those of Stcherbatsky (p. 163) and Yamaguchi.[18] Candrakīrti states in an earlier passage that worldly and conventional practices are cause for the accumulation of the roots for good ethical practice, and acknowledges a moral value in worldly convention. Stcherbatsky observes the difficulties for ethical theory involved here (p. 163, note 3). The phrase "acting as do elders in the world" is germane to the problem. "Traditional usages in the world" (*lokācāra*) signifies worldly proprieties, customs, and norms. To "denigrate" these means to ignore them and thus to sidestep them. The elders of the world, even when they scold children who break old and honored norms of behavior (and even if their criticism itself runs counter to the customs of the world), do not thereby refute the world itself. In like manner, when worldly convention is refuted by worldly convention, the theories that eliminate worldly convention are refuted, but worldly convention itself is not eliminated.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the fundamental standpoint of Mādhyamika philosophy shows two intertwining themes. The first is the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising, in which neither is elevated over the other. It is not a theory aimed exclusively at the negative logic of emptiness; but neither does it conclude merely with an organistic view of dependently co-arising being. Thus, in the second place, this identity must be established in light of the structure of the two truths, which are logically distinct and completely other from one another. To confuse the two truths is to render both emptiness and dependent co-arising obscure and opaque, and leads either to a theory of nothingness or to a theory of essential being. The Mādhyamika advocacy of non-being is a standpoint that is not a standpoint; it comes into play only in regard to "that which is admitted by the other."

All theories of nothingness, being, or some indeterminate state between non-being and being, inasmuch as their standpoint is one of existent essences, are termed realism (*vastu-vāda*). However, if the advocacy of the absence of essence is to go beyond realism, it must be contextualized in the structure of the two truths as absolutely other. This allows for a valid establishment of worldly convention in which transcendence is identified with reengagement in the world and the restoration of logical reason. The validation of worldly convention became an important point with the later Mādhyamika thinkers but, it would appear that the Chinese lineage of Mādhyamika thought did not pay sufficient attention to this validation of worldly convention and reengagement, nor to the examination of the basically rational structure of the two truths. Since emptiness and dependent co-arising are immediate and contemplative, not rational, in order to enunciate emptiness and dependent co-arising, one must consider them within the structure of the two truths. Otherwise, like the unskilled snake handler who is liable to get bitten, the tongue that speaks emptiness will get burned in its empty fire.

When emptiness is taken as an empty nothingness that negates the world, it is easily refuted by the counterattacks and countercharges of the world. But emptiness as the validation for everything in the worldly and conventional realm can be understood only in terms of the two truths. Even then, worldly convention cannot be validated unless it dovetails with ultimate meaning. The world is originally established as the clouded occlusion of worldly convention and functions through its own worldly and conventional reason, which in itself is opposed to ultimate meaning. The awareness that in complete otherness it is blinded to ultimate meaning need be affirmed only in regard to religious consciousness. All philosophical and scientific conventional discourse, although not skilled in differentiating the two truths, is established originally as worldly and conventional. This is to say, worldly convention need not be religious. However, in religious awareness, worldly convention itself is completely negated in ultimate meaning, and by that same ultimate meaning worldly convention is resurrected from its hopelessness to live once more within ultimate meaning.

These are the salient standpoints of Mādhyamika philosophy. We have devoted only slight attention to uniquely Mādhyamika reasoning or logical procedure. The development of logical reasoning from the differentiation of the two truths, at least as considered to be a skillful use of logic by the early Mādhyamika masters to eradicate and refute falsehood, contains a number of very important questions. These are the specific problems of the meaning of negation in a logic of negation, of the relationships of "true reason" and "knowledge by criteria." They must be concretely studied in connection with the later developments in the Mādhyamika thought: the split between the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika schools.

NOTE: In many aspects this work is dependent on Tsong-kha-pa's *Steps on the Way to Enlightenment* [*Lam-rim chen-mo*]. Tsong-kha-pa was a fourteenth-fifteenth century Tibetan and is renowned both as an important religious reformer and as a scholar-monk. The *Steps on the Way to Enlightenment* is one of his principal works. Even today the teachings of the *Steps* and of the Mādhyamika system are assiduously studied in all the Lamaist temples of Tibet and Mongolia. Sometime ago, I had sought out a few of these great monastic centers of learning in the hinterlands of Inner Mongolia and attained a rough understanding of the general outline of this work. After returning to Japan, I had the opportunity to translate the Vipaśyanā chapter, which constitutes the last half of the *Steps*. I had had frequent opportunity to familiarize

myself with Candrakīrti's commentaries on such texts as *The Stanzas in the Middle*, both in Chinese translations and in Sanskrit, but I had difficulty in understanding the orientation of Mādhyamika reasoning. Thus, I was more than overjoyed at the large number of points clarified by the *Steps*, even though I did not comprehend it in its entirety.

Notes

Foreword

1. See William J. Richardson's *Heidegger: Through Phenomonology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 201, 255-256.

2. For example, Joseph S. O'Leary's *Questioning Back: The Overcoming of Metaphysics in Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), pp. 1-56. O'Leary argues the point by employing Heidegger, although O'Leary himself understands and appreciates the depths of Nāgārjuna's thinking.

3. Nagao's interpretation is to be distinguished from other attempts to present Mādhyamika. Among the most notable are T. R. V. Murti's *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955). This study casts Mādhyamika thought in Kantian terms. David Kalupahana's *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1986) argues that Nāgārjuna maintains the early philosophy of the Buddha, in contrast to Candrakīrti, who gives Nāgārjuna a Vedantist slant. Nagao's work differs from the former in that he treats Mādhyamika within its own Buddhist context and from its own texts. Needless to say, Kalupahana's book is at direct variance with Nagao's understanding, which is heavily influenced by the Tibetan tradition of Tsong-kha-pa, and relies on Candrakīrti.

4. Prickett, Stephen, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 199.

5. Professor Leslie Kawamura of Calgary University is presently editing a collection of Nagao's articles, which will be soon published by SUNY press.

6. See my review of Nagao's "Chūkan to yushiki (Mādhyamika and Vijñaptimātratā)" in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3/2, 1980, pp. 105-107.

7. See the note appended to the end of the following translation. Nagao's translation of the *Lam-rim chen-mo* appears in his 西藏佛教研究 *A Study of Tibetan Buddhism: Being a Translation into Japanese of the Exposition of Vipaśyanā in Tsong-kha-pa's Lam-rim chen-mo with Annotation and Prefatory Remarks*] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1954).

8. See Gadjin Nagao, "Ascent and Descent: Two-Directional Activity in Buddhist Thought," in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7/1, 1984, pp. 176-184.

Chapter 1: Mādhyamika Philosophy

1. *Madhyamakāvatāra par Candrakīrti: Traduction Tibetaine*, Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Bibliotheca Buddhica IX, Biblio Verlag: Osnabrück (1970), 6.29. Candrakīrti presents the analogy of a person with defective eyesight. The denial of floaters before his eyes as unreal does not imply a negation of all reality. To see the true patterns of things clearly does not mean to analyze and examine the shapes and colors of those floaters in the man's eyes, but rather to negate them as illusory.

2. Yamaguchi Susumu, 佛教に於ける無と有との對論 *Debate on Being and Non-Being in Buddhism* (Tokyo: Kōbundō Shobō, 1941; reprinted by Sankibō Busshorin, 1975), pp. 20ff, pp. 29ff and 204.

3. Yamaguchi Susumu, 中觀佛教論攷 *Studies in Mādhyamika Buddhism* (Tokyo: Kōbundō Shobō, 1944, reprinted by Sankibō Busshorin 1974), pp. 37-38.

4. The term *āgantuka* means "adventitious, extrinsically, secondary" and is normally used with the meaning of "non-essential" to describe the relationship between defilement and the mind, as in the phrases, "adventitious defilement," "adventitious passion," or "ignorance wherein thought suddenly arises." See Yoshito S. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 50. In Buddhist literature it is not used to describe purified awakening. I venture to do so here because it aptly depicts the shift from illusion and defilement to awakening and purification in the context of the identity of emptiness and dependent co-arising.

Chapter 2: The Two Truths

1. Later Indian thinkers fled India and went to Tibet where, as translators and commentators, they established Tibetan Mādhyamika. This Tibetan Mādhyamika was strictly faithful to its Indian predecessor, and its thought has been handed down to the present in the Lamaist tradition. In this tradition, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva are called "the saintly father and son" and accorded equally profound reverence. The appellation seems to imply that there were no significant doctrinal differences between Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, and that there is not the slightest problem in relying on Āryadeva in the search for the true meaning of Nāgārjuna's teaching. Different opinions arose only after them, at the time of thinkers like Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka. As is evident in both parts of Āryadeva's *Catuḥśataka*, his focus is not only on rejection and

refutation, but rather on the valid establishment of worldly convention, which was thought at the time to reveal Nāgārjuna's true meaning.

2. Jayānanda's commentary (extant only in Tibetan) on Candrakīrti's *Mādhyamikāvatāra* (also extant only in Tibetan) interprets Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikā* as too preoccupied with negative argumentation to have developed more positive aspects. Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* takes this further step by treating the two truths as "the meaning of entering the middle path." Tsong-kha-pa and later Tibetan Mādhyamikans refuted this approach and taught that Nāgārjuna's *Kārikās* were not focused exclusively on negation, but did in fact offer a return to affirmation in its last chapters. In any event, this seems to prove that there was a strong tendency in India and Tibet to see the *Stanzas* of Nāgārjuna as engaged only in negative argumentation.

3. On the question of priority between the two truths, see Yamaguchi Susumu, *Sthiramati: Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīka* (Nagoya: Hajinkaku 1934; reprint, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1966), pp. 123ff.

Chapter 3: The Conventional World of Being

1. However, the Sanskrit terms corresponding to *ji-snyed-pa* and *ji-lta-ba* are not given for either term. Nor does Obermiller give them in his *The Doctrine of Prajñāpāramitā as Exposed in the Abhisamayālaṃkāra.* Hence, it was initially thought that the terms were probably first evolved in Tibet. In fact their formation must have been much earlier, since the corresponding Sanskrit terms, *yāvad-bhāvikatā* and *yathāvad-bhāvikatā*, can be already found in the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi.*

2. Wŏnch'ŭk (613-695) of the Hsi-ming Temple in his *Commentary on the Explication of Underlying Meaning* (chüan 22) says that "in the scriptural text these two natures (of being-to-its-limit and being-as-such) are found but are explained differently by the interpreters." He also notes the appearance of the terms in the *Śāsanodbhānana* (chüan 5 and chüan 16), in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (chüan 6), in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya-bhāṣya* (chüan 11), and in the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (chüan 26). He draws the different interpretations from these sources, which all treat the question of what these terms signify. Wŏnch'ŭk himself never aligns them with the two truths. Lamotte in his *L'Explication des Mystères*, p. 218, translates *yāvattā* as extension and *yathāvattā* as essence.

3. Yamaguchi Susumu, *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, pp. 123-125.

4. We are unable to pinpoint why and when the term *loka* was first understood as "destruction, collapse." But, if we look at the dictionary entry, the root for the term *loka* meaning "to see, know, illumine," is similar to the root for the term to destroy: *luk, luñc, lup, lū*, which can all mean "to destroy." We also find terms such as *luṭh, luḍ, luṇṭh, lubh*, meaning "to shake, to confuse." It was probably from these associations that the term *lu* came to mean "to

destroy." It was also interchanged with the term *ru*. Then, in contrast to terms like *ruc* and *roka*, which carry the sense of "light," the terms *ruj* and *roga* mean "to destroy." On the term *loka*, see *Wogihara Unrai bunshū*, p. 801. Wogihara thinks the term *loka* was derived from *uloka*, which came to be understood as meaning *loga* (*roga*), "destruction," based on the Pāli root *luj* (Sanskrit *ruj*). In the *Mahāvyutpatti*, 3061, we find *lujyata iti lokaḥ, 'jig-pas-na 'jig-rten*, that is, "it is the world because it is destroyed."

5. Wogihara, *Bunshū*, p. 784, quoting the Pāli *Suttanipāta* and the Sanskrit *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, shows a root meaning of "covered" or "common." According to him, the Chinese *su* corresponds to the Sanskrit *sammati*, which means "to regard [in common]" or "to agree upon." But he does not treat the form *saṃvṛtti* at all.

Chapter 4: The Truth of Worldly Convention

1. In his *Concept of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, Theodore Stcherbatsky equates *saṃvṛti* with the Tibetan *kun-rdzob* and *sāṃvṛta* with *kun rdzob-pa*. The question of whether in late Mādhyamika such a contrast of terms was clearly recognized has not however been studied adequately. Indeed, in the Lamaist doctrine *kun-rdzob-pa* is used in a somewhat ambiguous way. These terms appear frequently in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*. The first reference is *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās de Nāgārjuna avec le Prasannapadā de Candrakīrti*, Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Bibliotheca Buddhica IV, Biblio Verlag: Osnabrück (1970), on p. 10.12ff. Sprung, *The Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way. The Essential Chapters from the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti* (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1979), p. 34. Here Candrakīrti is commenting on the eight negations. He comments that the identification of "arising from causes" with dependent co-arising is intended to refute the arising of beings from unequal causes, such as self or other, and then describes the true being of dependent co-arising manifested through this refutation.

> tanniṣedhāc ca sāṃvṛtānāṃ padārthānāṃ yathāvasthitaṃ sāṃvṛtaṃ svarūpam udbhāvitaṃ bhavati/ sa evedānīṃ saṃvṛtaḥ pratītya-samutpādaḥ. . .//
>
> Furthermore, by this refutation the nature of beings within worldly convention is manifested as the state wherein all things in worldly convention are placed in suchness. Dependent co-arising, in regard to worldly convention. . . .

Since this passage is explaining dependent co-arising in Nāgārjuna's invocational stanza, it understands dependent co-arising as Nāgārjuna uses it in praising Buddha. Thus, *sāṃvṛta* is an adjectival modifier of dependent co-arising. It is translated above as "in regard to worldly convention" and "in worldly convention," but, when *sāṃvṛta* signified that which as occluded is turned toward true suchness, it must be understood as follows:

By the refutation (of no-arising, no passing away, etc.), the nature of the true reality of all beings which clouded and unknown to sentient beings, that is, the essence of beings which is hidden, is manifested. This is precisely the true nature of dependent co-arising as now hidden and occluded. . . .

Here "manifestation" is the activity of refutation and "that which is manifested" is the true mark of reality. However, this reality is also worldly and conventional as clouded and occluded dependent co-arising. One can see here the two meanings of the clouding and occluding of worldly convention and of manifestation treated above.

2. This manifestation (*udbhāvanā*) differs from phenomenal appearance (*avabhāsa*) as truth-clinging. See also Candrakīrti's use of the term in the passage quoted in the above note.

3. Yamaguchi Susumu, *Being and Non-Being*, pp. 58 and 448.

Chapter 5: Verbal Quiescence and Reaching Toward Ultimate Meaning

1. *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā*, pp. 125-127.

2. The first and second interpretations of ultimate meaning above appear in simplified form in Vinītadeva's Commentary on Sthiramati's *Commentary on the Thirty Verses.* See Yamaguchi Susumu, *Being and Non-Being*, p. 548; p. 103, note 3 for Vinītadeva's text.

3. The below description is drawn from Bhāvaviveka's *Tarkajvāla* commentary on his own *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* (probably the chapter "On Seeking Reality Wisdom"), as it is preserved in Tsong-kha-pa's *Lam-rim chen-mo.* See Nagao, 西藏佛教研究 *A Study of Tibetan Buddhism* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1954), p. 225. This study contains a Japanese translation of the last half of the *Lam rim chem-mo.* Also compare Alex Wayman, *Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real: Buddhist Meditation and the Middle Way, From the Lam rim chen mo of Tsoṅ-kha-pa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 280.

4. This is the explanation in Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakārtha-saṃgraha* and also appears in his *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*, section 3 ("On Seeking Reality Wisdom"), verse 6ff. See Yamaguchi, *Being and Non-Being*, p. 58.

5. *Prasannapadā*, p. 57.7-8: Paramārtho āryāṇaṃ tūṣṇīṃbhavaḥ.

6. Ibid.

Chapter 6: The Two Truths and the Path

1. *Madhyamikakārikā* 24.10. The Sanskrit reads: "Without relying on language (*vyavahāra*), ultimate meaning cannot be enunciated."

2. On the *trisvabhāva*, the *Triṃśika* (22d) explains, "If the pattern of full perfection is not seen, the pattern of other-dependence is not seen." This signifies reengagement. The "path" character of other dependence is seen in its full perfection as an ascending staircase.

3. Nāgārjuna's phrase, "not arising from itself" can also be interpreted in that way. If this means that the "self" is established beforehand as a "self-cause"—a set starting point—then it is delusory. Or again, if the self as end result were included beforehand in the self and present to the self, there would be no need for it ever to arise again. Such reasoning refutes the self-essence of either a starting point or a termination point; in other words, it exposes as illusory any conventional self seen as a starting point or as a terminus. It is not a negation of "being a path-only," a movement from something to something, namely, as "worldly convention only."

4. Later we use the terms "worldly convention-only," "dependent co-arising only," and "being-only" in the same Mādhyamika perspective.

5. Śākyamuni is said to have discovered the path "of the ancient sages." That path was completely overgrown, but its contours remained discernible under the foliage. Since it was not discovered or trodden by human beings, Śākyamuni's discovery was a special case, a case of seeing it only from the standpoint of enlightenment.

6. The theory of the four conventions and the four truths is derived from chüan 64 (T. 30, p. 653c-654a) of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (four conventions) and chüan 9 of the *Ch'eng Wei-shih lun* (four truths); de la Vallée Poussin, *Le Siddhi de Hiuan-Tsang* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929), p. 577. Also see chapter 2 "On the Meaning of the Two Truths" in Ch'i's *Ta-ch'eng fa-yen i-lin ch'ang*, T. 45, pp. 287b-94a.

Chapter 7: The Recovery of Worldly Convention from Emptiness

1. See Nagao, "The Buddhist World-View as Elucidated in the Three-Natures Theory and its Similes," *The Eastern Buddhist*, 16/1 (1983): 1-18.

2. *Madhyāntavibhāga*, Tattvārtha chapter, verse 3.

3. The term "character" appears neither in Nāgārjuna's basic stanzas nor in Candrakīrti's commentary, which gives simply "emptiness." Only the Chinese commentaries on the *Kārikā* have "the character of emptiness." Note that the present treatment is quite different from the famous passage in *The Awakening of Faith* with its categories of Essence, Attributes, and Influences (See Hakeda, pp. 64-72).

4. The activity within the conceivable world of "that which is inconceivable" remains inconceivable. No less inconceivable is it that absolutely other ultimate meaning leaps over the absolute abyss. The manifestation of Buddha, who in

no sense is either of a defiled or a sentient nature, as entirely defiled and sentient is also inconceivable because of the complete otherness of that manifestation. In other words, when silence becomes expressed in language and reason, it is not inconceivable only when seen by sentient beings; it is also inconceivable for a buddha who is apart from conceptualization. It is not that Buddha-thoughts cannot be judged by sentient beings because they are of a different nature than those of sentient beings. Thinking is the same in both cases, but awakening distances one from thinking. Therefore the manifestation of being seen as ultimate meaning within worldly convention can be described conversely as worldly and conventional conceptualization. Such a manifestation entails the self-alienation of ultimate meaning treated earlier.

5. For example, this statement that "unreal imagining exists" and the statement at the beginning of the *Triṃśika* about "the provisional discourse on self and beings" (which is then followed by a series of demonstrations) suggest that the entire system centers on reengagement as an outflow from enlightenment. Even in Mādhyamika, "imagining" is entangled in primal ignorance and is no different from "unreal imagining." When brought to speech, it itself evokes an understanding of its own primal ignorance and occlusion. That is, imagining divides understanding into false worldly convention and true worldly convention, and only then goes on to distinguish worldly convention from ultimate meaning. It knows that what develops in this process—what is called "truth in worldly convention"—is totally permeated by primal ignorance. But the Vijñaptimātratā system begins with the affirmation that "unreal imagining exists," taking as its starting point and basic focus the defiled evolutions of consciousness, which are then proven to be illusory by demonstrating the non-being of their putative objects. Through this procedure the Vijñaptimātratā system is gradually unfolded. Therefore, Mādhyamika, in seeing an absolute otherness between the two truths, has no system (for in their eyes any system is worldly and conventional), while Vijñaptimātratā, whose theoretical implications are systematically developed, can, as a skillful method for entering the unmarked from the "marked" phenomenal realm, be described as an ascending path schema. Thus, Mādhyamika, while continually engaged in refutation, evokes the figure of a bodhisattva in reengagement. While Vijñaptimātratā thought is organized around the theme of reengagement and is a method to validate worldly convention, this validation is accomplished by a bodhisattva who seeks non-being in transcendence.

6. In the three patterns, the other-dependent is the center, which issues in the imagined world. It is here that reengagement can occur as other-dependence opens up to the world of full perfection. In this sense, reengagement involves a more static logic that is constituted within enlightened reasoning and does not generate a deluded reasoning from that enlightenment. Instead, the three patterns are turned toward the three non-patterns (from dependent co-arising to emptiness), and not the other way around. On the comparison between Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, see Nagao Gadjin, "From Mādhyamika to Yogācāra: An Analysis of MMK XXIV.18 and MV I.1-2," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 2/1 (1979): 29-43.

7. The San-lun theme of the identity between overthrowing falsehood and manifesting truth may be thought to demonstrate this. But, as mentioned frequently above, even though there is a revelation of ultimately meaningful silence in the truth thus manifested, there is no orientation toward its opposite: cultural and conventional discourse with its free use of verbal explanation and its inclusion of both truth and falsehood.

8. Jayānanda's commentary (extant only in Tibetan) on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (also extant only in Tibetan) interprets Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikā* as too preoccupied with negative argumentation to have developed more positive aspects. Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* takes this further step by treating the two truths as "the meaning of entering the middle path." Tsong-kha-pa and later Tibetan Mādhyamikans refuted this approach and taught that Nāgārjuna's *Kārikās* were not focused exclusively on negation, but did in fact offer a return to affirmation in its last chapters. In any event, this seems to prove that there was a strong tendency in India and Tibet to see the *Stanzas* of Nāgārjuna as engaged only in negative argumentation.

9. Bhāvaviveka's thinking on this point is not the same as Candrakīrti's. In Candrakīrti "even in the worldly and conventional, there are no essences." Bhāvaviveka proposes "an existent essence within the context of worldly convention." In line with his provisional recognition of a worldly and conventional essential being, he attempts to evolve an "independent reasoning" on the strength of that worldly convention. Thus, his "validation of worldly convention" does not establish worldly convention, but is only an establishment dependent on worldly convention.

Chapter 8: Differentiation and Original Awakening

1. *Prasannapadā*, p. 491. Sprung, p. 229: evaṃ pratītyasamutpāda-śabdhasya yo'rthaḥ sa śūnyatāśabdhasyārtho.

2. Even today it is common in Southern Buddhism for those who have become monks to leave their discipline, return to the world, become householders, and take up employment in worldly tasks such as government service.

3. The middle path is generally taken to mean not falling into either extreme of suffering or happiness, being or non-being. In both the threefold truth stanza quoted above and in the stanza from the chapter "On Reality," the middle path signifies neither being nor non-being. This meaning can then be further expanded to cover an understanding of the middle path as a differentiation of the two truths of ultimate meaning and worldly convention. This is the "new" point of the present interpretation.

Chapter 9: Worldly Convention as Being-Only

1. The following description relies on the *Lam-rim chen-mo*. See Nagao,

A Study of Tibetan Buddhism, pp. 270-272; Wayman, *Calming the Mind*, pp. 318-320. Tsong-kha-pa's threefold analysis is probably based on Candrakīrti's *Mādhyamakāvatara* 6.28, for the content of this stanza schematically presents true worldly convention and false worldly convention.

2. *Madhyamakakārikā* 7.30ff. *Prasannapadā* p. 329.10-18.

3. *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Nagao, p. 133, Wayman, p. 199.

4. In modern Lamaism, the term *snang-stong* carries important doctrinal meaning. It is a technical term formed by combining in abbreviated form *snang-ba*, to appear, with *stong-pa-nyid*, emptiness. Thus, while appearances and emptiness are in contrast, they are also in synergy. Priority is given to neither.

5. Candrakīrti, *Bodhisattva-yogacaryā-catuḥśataka-ṭīkā*, Peking ed., 98, p. 270, 3. Only Sanskrit fragments are extant.

6. *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Nagao, p. 318ff.

7. *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Nagao, p. 320; Wayman, p. 361. Here Tsong-kha-pa refers to "the former masters," while an almost identical idea occurs in Nāgārjuna's *Yuktiṣaṣtikā*, verses 25-27.

8. *Bodhisattva-yogacaryā-catuḥśataka-ṭīkā*, Peking ed., 98, p. 274, 4.

Chapter 10: The Role of Reason

1. A parallel account appears in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* (2.16-20), which reports the profundity of the true doctrine, the difficulty sentient beings have in really understanding it, Śākyamuni's consequent reluctance to preach it, and the likelihood of errors arising from its misunderstanding. Also see 1.73-74. Tsong-kha-pa comments on this in his *Drang-ba dang nges-pa*, 35b-36a (P. ed.).

2. Bhāvaviveka entitled his own commentary on his main work, *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*, the *Tarkajvāla* (The Flame of Dialectics), while Candrakīrti criticizes dialecticians, *tārkika*.

3. *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Nagao, p. 151; Wayman, p. 214.

4. *Lam-rim chen-mo*, Nagao, p. 159; Wayman, p. 218.

5. *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.31.

6. The presence or absence of the phrase "ultimately meaningful" is one of the many differences between the two schools, but not the main point of divergence.

7. This was the basic attitude of Bhāvaviveka as a Svātrantika in setting up independent reason and logical procedures and in developing an all-inclusive reasoning of refutation. I am drawing principally on the texts of Candrakīrti's

lineage, however, and am not directly informed about it from Bhāvaviveka's own writings. This may lead to errors in my interpretation. Bhāvaviveka was a Mādhyamikan and of course took as fundamental the emptiness of ultimate meaning, which is probably why he thought of worldly convention as being. At the same time, the negation of the value of worldly convention must be the reason for regarding emptiness and the absence of essence as ultimately meaningful. One needs to look deeper into the motives behind Bhāvaviveka's recognition of essences "as worldly and conventional language." Moreover, one cannot overlook the subtle shift of focus, for while Candrakīrti recognized language as the being of worldly convention, he stressed that "their essence is non-existent as language." Candrakīrti, Tsong-kha-pa, and their line, while recognizing that Bhāvaviveka was a Mādhyamikan, went so far as to call him a "realist," not "a proponent of the absence of essence."

8. *Prasannapadā*, p. 27ff, Sprung, p. 40ff. Regarding the additional distinction "as ultimately meaningful," there is a discussion of the error of an *assidha-ādhāra* of the theses in Bhāvaviveka's logic and of *āśraya-asiddha* in his reason.

9. *Prasannapadā*, p. 34.4ff; Sprung, pp. 41-42 (partial).

10. *Prasannapadā*, p. 20.1ff.

11. This term does not itself appear in the *Prasannapadā*, but in the phrase *para-pratijñā-niṣedha-phalatva* (efficacious for refuting the theses of others) (p. 34.5), its meaning can be deduced. Then in line 6 and 10 *tat-prasiddha-anumāna* and *sva-prasiddha-anumāna* correspond precisely to "inference admitted by the other." Furthermore, p. 57.10, the phrase *lohata eva prasiddha-upapattiḥ* (to enlighten the other by means of reasoning well admitted in the world) is the same in meaning.

12. It is not merely the inference that belongs to the other; the very use of the criteria of direct perception and inference is already of the other in harmony with the world. In the *Prasannapadā*, p. 75.2-9; Sprung, pp. 63-64, the four criteria of direct perception, inference, scripture, and analogy are simply defined and seem to be admitted as valid. Dignāga's attempts to recognize only the two criteria of direct perception and inference are thereby criticized as implying the Svātantrika position.

13. *Prasannapadā*, p. 57.9 to 58.3, and ff; Sprung, pp. 50-51.

14. Candrakīrti's term *para-pratijñā-niṣedha-phalatvat*, mentioned in note 56, does not grant meaning or value to inferences or logical procedures as such, but sees their value only as instruments in the refutation of the other's propositions. In short, by using the other's inferences—by employing inference minimally—the maximum scope of meaning and efficacy are attained.

15. *Madhyamikāvatāra* 6.30.

16. *Bodhisattva-yogacaryā-catuḥśataka-ṭīkā*, Peking ed., 98, p. 261,3,

commenting on stanza 311, section 13.

17. *Prasannapadā*, p. 69; Sprung, pp. 59-60.

18. The phrase "he employs arguments against worldly convention, saying that it does not correspond to true reasoning" shows an understanding of the fact that worldly convention is sometimes regarded as destroyed by the application of true reasoning to it—something that worldly convention can not stand up to. In the English translation of Stcherbatsky (*Concept of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, p. 163), the phrase is understood to mean that the world is negated by a "wrong logic," that is, as a result of a mistake in the application of true reasoning to the world. Furthermore, "the elders of the world" are understood to refer not only to the ancient traditional masters, but also to "the ancient authorities (logicians)."

Glossary

References to English terms refer to the pages of this book. They are followed by Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese readings when available. Japanese readings end the entries with page references to Nagao's original Japanese text in Chūkan to yuishiki.

ability to bring about meaning, p. 58: artha-kriyā-kṣama; gi o nasu no kuriki, p. 57: 義をなす功力

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